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SALAR
DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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On the occasion of Christmas, our office will remain closed on 25 December. Hence, there will be no edition of

SALAR DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY

dated 26 December

Don't compare 5pm turnout to final data: EC to Cong

EC ruled out deletion of voters from list in M'rashtra polls

NEW DELHI, 24 DEC

Election Commission on Tuesday asserted that there were no arbitrary additions or deletions of voters in Maharashtra where Assembly polls were held recently.

In its response to Congress, EC said it would not be correct to compare 5pm voter turnout data with 11.45pm final polling data.

Congress approached the poll panel in November flagging various concerns in Maharashtra Assembly polls.

Coming out with a detailed note and frequently asked questions (FAQs), the poll authority told the Congress that increase in voter turnout from 5pm to 11.45pm was normal, being part of the process of aggregation of voter turnout.

EC asserted that it is impossible to change actual voter turnout as statutory Form 17C giving details of voter turnout is available with authorised agents of candidates at the time of close of poll at the polling station itself.

It said rule-based process was followed with transparency in Maharashtra electoral roll preparation.

It told Congress that due process was followed, including participation of Congress representatives in preparation of electoral rolls.

The commission told party that its complaint of an average addition of 50,000 electors between July and November in 50 seats, out of which 47 have been won by the Mahayuti, is incorrect.

It said the fact is that only six Assembly seats 50,000 electors during the period. Hence the question of winning in 47 seats on this basis does not arise.

It underlined that there were no bulk deletions or unusual deletion patterns of noticed across all assembly seats.

Deletions of an average of 2,779 electors per seat happened on account of death or shifting and duplicate entries after following due process, including participation of party representatives.

The Commission reiterated that political parties, being key stakeholders, are involved scrupulously at each and every stage of the election process from 'Roll to Poll' (preparation of electoral rolls to completion of poll process). —*PTI*

Congress leaders KC Venugopal and Jairam Ramesh during a press conference, at AICC HQ in New Delhi, on Tuesday **PHOTO: PTI**

Cong moves SC over restricting access to poll docus

NEW DELHI, 28 DEC

Congress on Tuesday filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court challenging the recent amendments to the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961 and expressed hope that the apex court will help restore the "fast eroding" integrity of the electoral process.

The government has tweaked an election rule to prevent public inspection of certain electronic documents such as CCTV camera and webcasting footage as well as video recordings of candidates to prevent their misuse.

AICC general secretary Jairam Ramesh, filed the petition

Ramesh said the Election Commission, a Constitutional body charged with the conduct of free and fair elections cannot be allowed to unilaterally, and without public consultation, amend such a vital law in such a brazen manner. —*PTI*

Cong to decide 2025 poll plan in Belagavi

NEW DELHI, 24 DEC

The Congress party is set to formulate its strategy for the coming year during an extended Congress Working Committee (CWC) meeting titled 'Nav Satyagraha Baithak' in Belagavi, Karnataka. This meeting commemorates the 100th anniversary of the 1924 Congress session presided over by Mahatma Gandhi.

During a joint press conference, Congress leaders emphasised that the "insult" to BR Ambedkar by Home Minister Amit Shah will be a focal point for discussion. Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh stated that the resolution will demand Shah's resignation and an apology for his remarks, labelling the current week as 'Ambedkar Samman Saptah'.

Following the CWC meeting on 26 December, a 'Jai Bapu, Jai Bhim, Jai Samvidhan' rally is scheduled for 27 December in Belagavi, where Congress intends to highlight their grievances against the current government's actions perceived as undermining the Constitution and democratic values.

Ramesh accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP of attempting to alter constitutional principles, declaring, "They do not want the Constitution." He also dismissed RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat's recent comments on communal disputes as "double standards." Congress general secretary KC Venugopal affirmed that the party is actively mobilising support and that demonstrations are occurring nationwide, demanding Shah's resignation. The meeting will gather around 200 leaders, who will deliberate on challenges facing India under BJP rule, focusing on economic inequality and potential threats to constitutional institutions. The CWC's discussions hope to yield impactful decisions. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

GRAP IV revoked in Delhi as air improves

NEW DELHI, 24 DEC

A panel from the Central Government has lifted Stage IV restrictions under the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) for the Delhi-National Capital Region (NCR) following a noticeable decline in air pollution levels. An official order issued on Tuesday reported that the 24-hour average Air Quality Index (AQI) had decreased to 369 as of 4pm. Weather forecasts from the India Meteorological Department and the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology predict further improvements in air quality due to favourable meteorological conditions. Stage IV regulations had involved a comprehensive ban on construction activities, restrictions on non-essential polluting trucks entering the city, and the enforcement of hybrid classes for all except Grade 10 and 12. —***PTI***

Cops grill Allu Arjun for 3 hours in stampede case

HYDERABAD, 24 DEC

Top Telugu actor Allu Arjun was on Tuesday grilled by police for over three hours when he appeared before them for questioning in connection with the death of a woman in a stampede during the screening of 'Pushpa-2' here on 4 December. Arjun reached the Chikkadpally police station accompanied by his father Allu Aravind and lawyers a little after 11am and the questioning was held till 2.45pm. A police team led by Central Zone DCP Akshansh Yadav questioned the actor. The actor was issued a notice on 23 December to appear before the police at 11am on Tuesday. —***PTI***

>>>More on Page 4

Out on bail, man again rapes 70-yr-old victim

BHARUCH, 24 DEC

A 35-year-old man out on bail allegedly raped a 70-year-old woman whom he had sexually assaulted in the past in Bharuch district of Gujarat, police said on Tuesday. The accused, Shailesh Rathod, committed the crime on 15 and 22 December in the old woman's hut at a farm, said Deputy Superintendent of Police PL Chaudhary. An FIR was registered at Amod police station after the woman approached the police, following which teams of the crime branch, Special Operations Group, and police were formed to nab the accused. Rathod was earlier arrested for allegedly raping the same victim around 18 months ago and jailed. Recently, an 11-year-old daughter of a migrant labourer was raped in Bharuch. The victim, who suffered injuries to her internal organs during the sexual assault, died after almost a week. —***PTI***

IT'S JINGLE BELLS AGAIN

Devotees attend mass on the eve of Christmas at St Mary's Basilica at Shivajinagar in Bengaluru on Tuesday **PHOTOS: MOHAMMED ASAD**

RG Kar crime scene tampered? Forensics say there was 'no struggle'

KOLKATA, 24 SEPT

A report of Central Forensic Science Laboratory (CFSL) said that its team did not find any "signs" of "struggle" in the seminar room of RG Kar Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata where a doctor was raped and murdered on 9 August.

The report strengthens the fears that actual "scene of the crime" was someplace else and after the murder the body was shifted to the seminar hall.

The report also questioned how someone could have entered the seminar room, commit a crime and leave, without anyone noticing him as the seminar room was located on the TB ward on the third floor, which is manned by nursing station.

The analysis also revealed that "no biological stains" were detected in the seminar room.

The CFSL report lamented that the scene of crime "was not in well-preserved condition" and there was evidence of "disturbance".

The team inspected the crime scene on 14 August, a day after

The victim's parents said they are aggrieved and dissatisfied with CBI's probe **PHOTO: PTI**

Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) took over the case. By that time the Kolkata Police SIT had already visited the crime scene and had collected 40 items.

The report prompted concerns whether CBI would be able to establish the case against Sanjay Roy, the civic volunteer with the local police who was first arrested by the Kolkata police. Meanwhile, parents of the victim approached Calcutta High Court, flagging concerns in the CBI's investigation and seeking the court's intervention in the case that shook the nation. The bench the case is before Supreme Court and it can hear only after it is clear if the top court is monitoring the probe. The next hearing on the matter could take place around 15 January.

The parents said they are "aggrieved" and "dissatisfied" with CBI's probe. —*Agencies*

'LAPSE ON MY PART'

After snub, Manu says did not file for Khel Ratna

NEW DELHI, 24 DEC

Double bronze-medallist Manu Bhaker has expressed regret over a potential oversight in her nomination for this year's National Sports Awards, amidst ongoing controversy regarding her exclusion from the list of Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna awardees.

In a social media statement, the 22-year-old pistol shooter stated, "As an athlete my role is to play and perform for my country. I believe there has been a lapse, maybe on my part while filing for the nomination, which is being corrected." This clarification comes in the wake of the sports ministry's assurance that the list of awardees has not yet been finalised.

Bhaker, who made history as the first athlete from independent India to win two medals at a single Olympic Games, reassured her supporters, saying her motivation to achieve success for her country remains unchanged, regardless of whether she receives an award. "Awards and recognition keep me motivated, but they are not my goal," she added, urging fans not to speculate on the matter.

Concern has been voiced by her father, Ramkishan Bhaker, and personal coach, Jaspal Rana, who have expressed that her exclusion has impacted her morale and drive. Nonetheless, Bhaker remains focused on her commitment to perform for India.

The sports ministry has indicated that Bhaker is likely to be included in the final list of nominees, which includes prominent athletes such as men's hockey captain Harmanpreet Singh and Paralympic gold medal-winning high jumper Praveen Kumar. The selection committee, chaired by retired Supreme Court judge Justice V Ramasubramanian, is expected to finalise the list in the coming days. Bhaker won her bronze medals in the 10m air pistol individual and mixed team events at the recent Paris Olympics. —*PTI*

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Manu Bhaker **PHOTO: PTI**

5 KILLED AS ARMY VAN PLUNGES INTO 300FT J&K GORGE

MENDHAR, 24 DEC

Five soldiers were killed and as many others injured when an Army vehicle skidded off the road and rolled down a 300-feet deep gorge in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district Tuesday evening, officials said.

The injured have been shifted to a military hospital for treatment, they said, adding one of them is in critical condition.

The accident occurred in the Gharoa area when the vehicle was on its way to Banoi in the district, they said.

Rescue teams are on the job and they have recovered five bodies from the gorge which is around 300-350 feet deep, they added. Northern Army Commander Lieutenant General MV Suchindra Kumar and all ranks of Dhruva Command extend their deepest condolences on the tragic loss of five brave soldiers. —*PTI*

Bhalla is Manipur Guv; Arif moved to Bihar

Ajay Kumar Bhalla and Arif Mohammed Khan **PHOTO: PTI**

NEW DELHI, 24 DEC

Former Union Home Secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla has been appointed the governor of strife-torn Manipur, ex-Army chief Vijay Kumar Singh is the new Mizoram governor while Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan has been shifted to Bihar as part of gubernatorial appointments effected by President Droupadi Murmu on Tuesday.

Bihar Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar has been named the governor of Kerala in place of Khan, according to the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Arif Mohammed Khan has been appointed as Bihar Governor, the Rashtrapati Bhavan said in a statement.

President Murmu has accepted the resignation of Odisha Governor Raghubar Das, it said.

Mizoram Governor Hari Babu Kambhampati has been appointed as the new Odisha Governor in place of Das, the statement said. These appointments will take effect from the dates they will assume charge of their respective offices, it added. A governor is the constitutional head of a state and has similar powers and functions at the state level as those of the President of India. —*PTI*

Belagavi gears up for Cong centenary event

Sonia, Rahul, Priyanka to attend with 150MPs; Obama is also invited to honour Gandhi

Belagavi has been adorned with 2,00,000 LED lights, covering 104km. The event is scheduled to be held in Belagavi on 26 and 27 December

PHOTOS: SALAR

BELAGAVI, 24 DEC

Belagavi is gearing up for a grand celebration to mark the 100th anniversary of the historic Congress convention presided over by Mahatma Gandhi on 26-27 December, 1924. This significant event will attract prominent figures, including Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi, and Priyanka Gandhi, as well as AICC members and 150 MPs, who will gather in Belagavi for a two-day convention on Thursday and Friday.

Invitations have also been extended to former US President Barack Obama, recognised by many as a world leader. His participation is anticipated, particularly since he may address the joint legislative session of the state at the Suvarna Vidhan Soudha during the celebration of "Gandhi Bharat," as the Congress has named the centenary year. Year-long programmes are planned across the state to commemorate this significant milestone.

The original convention in 1924 took place near the First Railway Gate, conveniently located close to Belagavi railway station, ensuring easy access for attendees. Special railway stops have been arranged at this location to facilitate swift transit. The venue has been named Veerasoudha, and a traditional open well, Pampasarovara, has been refurbished to meet water requirements for the event.

Notable figures who attended the 1924 convention alongside Gandhi included Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel, Sarojini Naidu, and Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad. A welcome committee led by Gangadharao Deshpande ensured the smooth arrival of delegates. Historian and senior journalist Subhash Kulkarni noted that the original convention cost Rs 2.20 lakh, while the government has allocated Rs 25 crore for the centenary celebration in 2024. Over Rs 2,20,000 was raised in 1924 from various sources, including membership fees, khadi product sales, donations, and entry fees for attendees. In anticipation of the centenary, Belagavi has been adorned with 2,00,000 LED lights, covering 104km and managed by an agency overseen by V Mohankumar. This dazzling display is reminiscent of the festive decorations in Mysuru during the Dasara festival. Belagavi Deputy Commissioner Mohammed Roshan remarked on the city's transformation, promising that the lights will remain illuminated from 9 December until 1 January. —*Salar News*

History-sheeters' home raided in surprise check

BENGALURU, 24 DEC

City police conducted a surprise raid on the residences of history-sheeters across Bengaluru to ensure they are not involved in any crime. This operation is part of New Year celebrations preparations.

The raid began early at 5 am on Tuesday in including Byadarahalli, Parappana Agrahara, and Madanayakanahalli, with police knocking on doors, catching the rowdy-sheeters and their families by surprise. Armed with search warrants, the police teams searched the houses for weapons, phones, documents, and explosives. More than 40 rowdy-sheeters were raided simultaneously, and machetes, daggers, and pistols, were seized. —*Salar News*

CM wishes Shivarajkumar speedy recovery

BENGALURU, 24 DEC

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Tuesday wished Kannada superstar Shivarajkumar a speedy recovery.

He left for the US on 18 December for surgery. Shivarajkumar said his surgery was scheduled for 24 December at the Miami Cancer Institute (MCI).—*PTI*

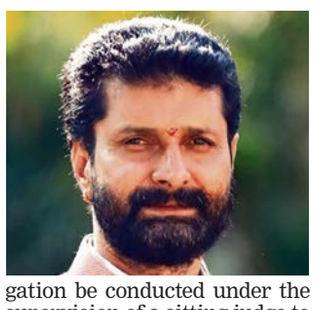
2 blackmail woman with private videos, exhort ₹5L; arrested

BENGALURU, 24 DEC

Two people were arrested on 21 December for extortion and blackmail after they allegedly used a woman's private videos to threaten her, police said on Tuesday. The victim filed a complaint with the Central Crime Branch (CCB) police. According to probe, one of the accused owns an electrical equipment store in the Electronics City. The victim met the accused in 2017, and they developed a friendship that soon turned into a live-in relationship. The accused recorded intimate videos of her. The situation escalated when the accused allegedly pressured the victim to attend parties and form relationships with other men. The victim ended the relationship in 2021 and moved out. However, the accused continued to harass her, demanding she return to him. When she refused, he allegedly extorted Rs 5 lakh from her.—*Salar News*

CID to probe Hebbalkar, Ravi row

HUBBALLI, 24 DEC



Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara has announced a Criminal Investigation Department (CID) inquiry following allegations that BJP leader CT Ravi used derogatory language against Minister Laxmi Hebbalkar during a Legislative Council session last week. The incident occurred on December 19 amid a heated exchange that led to a temporary adjournment of the House. Ravi was arrested later that evening based on Hebbalkar's complaint.

Parameshwara stated that the investigation would scrutinise both the derogatory remarks and a separate case concerning an alleged attempt to attack Ravi within the Suvarna Vidhana Soudha premises. Responding to critics, including Legislative Council Chairman Basavaraj Horatti, who claimed the matter should be considered a 'closed chapter', Parameshwara affirmed the necessity of the CID probe, stating, "police will have to do their duty."

Regarding the delay in filing the FIR, the Minister explained that legal protocols had to be observed, which contributed to the five-day wait. "Everything has to be done in the right manner," he insisted.

Ravi has denied using any offensive language and has requested that the CID investigation be conducted under the supervision of a sitting judge to ensure impartiality. He expressed trust in the police force when procedures are not compromised, emphasising that justice must prevail regardless of external pressures. The High Court intervened on 20 December, ordering Ravi's immediate release and highlighting procedural failures during his arrest while also calling for his full cooperation with the ongoing investigation. —*PTI*

RAVI MOVED PLACES FOR SECURITY: COPS

BELAGAVI, 24 DEC

In response to allegations of mistreatment during custody, police clarified that MLC CT Ravi was moved to various locations for security reasons. Following his arrest, Ravi was initially transferred to the Khanapura police station due to concerns over safety amid a large crowd of supporters and media presence, police said. This environment reportedly risked creating a chaotic situation, prompting further relocation to Ramadurga.

Ravi claimed he was kept on the move throughout the night —*PTI*

Shah's Ambedkar barb: Bandh in Kalaburagi

KALABURAGI, 24 DEC

Protests ignited in Kalaburagi on Tuesday, responding to a bandh called by Dalit organisations to express outrage over recent remarks made by Union Home Minister Amit Shah regarding BR Ambedkar in Parliament.

In preparation for potential unrest, police enforced extensive security measures throughout the city, ensuring traffic disruptions and shop closures aligned with the bandh. "The city is entirely shut down, with no buses, auto rickshaws, or taxis operating," a police representative confirmed.

"We have deployed a large police presence to maintain order, and the situation remains peaceful and under control."

Demonstrators took to the streets, burning tyres at key locations including the city bus stand and several major circles. They expressed their anger through slogans directed at the BJP and Amit Shah, demanding his resignation from the Home Minister's position. A significant protest march commenced from Nagareshwar School in the Ganj area, proceeding towards the deputy commissioner's office. Shah's controversial remarks included a statement likening repeated references to Ambedkar to a "fashion," remarking that if people invoked God's name as often, they would attain a place in heaven.

This comment has heightened tensions among the protesters, who view it as disrespectful to Ambedkar's legacy. —*PTI*

Cybercrime hotlines not working

BENGALURU, 24 DEC

The Indian IT capital finds itself in a troubling situation as rising cybercrimes go largely unreported, with most hotlines designated for reporting such incidents either out of service or unanswered. Notably, Bengaluru is home to India's first Cyber Crime Police Station, established in 2001, and has since developed a further eight CEN (Cybercrime, Economic and Narcotics Offences) Police Stations.

Despite being operational around the clock, many of these CEN hotlines have been found to be unreachable. A recent investigation by social activist Dushyant Dubey, leading his NGO St Brofus' Army, highlighted this alarming trend. Dubey was prompted to investigate after a victim of cybercrime was directed to the East Division CEN Police Station, only to find the hotline non-functional.

Over three days, Dubey and his team called various CEN hotlines, but aside from the South CEN Police Station in Banashankari and the Whitefield CEN Police Station, they encountered silence from the others. Dubey stated, "We were shocked to discover these numbers appear to exist only on paper," sharing a video on social media that captured his unsuccessful attempts to reach the East Division hotline. Despite tagging Bengaluru City Police officials in his online posts, Dubey has yet to receive a response. Frustrated citizens took to social media to express their grievances about the unresponsiveness of the CEN hotlines, with one number, 9449295760, reportedly notorious for being unhelpful. —*PTI*

KSRTC INDUCTS 20 AMBAARI UTSAV SLEEPER BUSES

BENGALURU, 24 DEC

Transport and Muzrai Minister Ramalingareddy on Tuesday inaugurated 20 Ambaari Utsav sleeper buses of Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC).

He also distributed temporary deputation orders for Driver-cum-Conductors to 82 candidates with highest scores in the driving test conducted at the Humnabad Training Centre.

Ambaari Utsav sleeper buses will operate between Bengaluru and Kundapura, Mangaluru, Nellore, Hyderabad, Vijayawada, Kozhikode, Thrissur and Ernakulam.

New Volvo sleeper buses during KSRTC 'Ambaari Utsav' flag off ceremony in Bengaluru on Tuesday PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

According to KSRTC, 35.43 lakh passengers daily make use of its service through 8,896 vehicles. —*PTI*

Business deal gone wrong: Friend kills man over ₹20K

BENGALURU, 24 DEC

A financial disagreement between two friends tragically ended in violence, resulting in one man's death in the city.

The victim has been identified as 45-year-old Afsar, a resident of Begur.

His friend, Akbar, who lives in Shivajinagar, was arrested shortly after the incident.

Preliminary investigations reveal that Afsar and Akbar had co-founded a meat shop eight months ago in Begur. However, the venture faced difficulties, prompting Akbar to consider opening a separate shop.

He subsequently demanded that Afsar return his investment, claiming an outstanding balance of Rs 20,000, despite Afsar having already repaid Rs 3,00,000. The conflict intensified during a late-night argument on Monday.

Eyewitness accounts and police reports indicate that the verbal dispute escalated into a physical confrontation.

In a fit of rage, Akbar allegedly struck Afsar on the head with a meat-cutting machete inside the shop. The forceful blow resulted in severe bleeding, and Afsar died instantly at the scene.

Authorities were alerted, and the police promptly arrived to investigate. Afsar's body has been sent for a post-mortem examination, while Akbar remains in custody.

A case has been registered, and further inquiries are ongoing. —*Salar News*

BOOK CONFISCATION FIASCO

Secret Santa not religious: Cubbon Reads

BENGALURU, 24 DEC

Using the word 'Santa' in a meet-up does not make it religious, organisers of 'Cubbon Reads' defend, as their 'Secret Santa Saturday', organised on 21 December at Cubbon Park ended with books being confiscated by park authorities.

One of the reasons provided by the authorities for confiscating books is that 'no religious activities are allowed inside the park'.

Since March 2023, every Saturday, between 9am and 2pm, people drop in with a mat and book, joining others already there, and read. The community, founded by Harsh Shehanshu and Shruti Sah, called themselves Cubbon Reads.

It has spawned not only many reading groups in other parks of Bengaluru, such as Lalbagh Reads, but also communities such as Cubbon Paints and Cubbon Runs.

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

Security guards confiscate gift-wrapped books at Cubbon Park

With Christmas round the corner, for their 101st edition, Cubbon Reads organisers had invited people to come with a wrapped book to participate in the Secret Santa book exchange. But horticulture authorities intervened thinking they were selling the books. The heated exchange ended with the authorities walking away with the wrapped books.

The community organisers also refuted the allegations that over 1,000 people had gathered on December 21.

The organisers alleged that the authorities first took two of their curators to the Department of Horticulture office.

"The security guards there were talking about imposing fines from anywhere between Rs 25,000 and Rs 60,000," according to the press note.

Former Infosys CFO, TV Mohandas Pai chipped in with his experience at the park, saying that the guards are rude and push citizens around. —*PTI*

GESCOM officials booked after woman injured by live wire

KALABURAGI, 24 DEC

A case has been registered against the officials of GESCOM and the City Corporation after a 34-year-old woman sustained injuries when an overhead live wire snapped and fell on her in the district headquarters town of Kalaburagi, police said on Tuesday.

The woman, who is undergoing treatment at a private hospital, sustained severe injuries to her hands, legs, and stomach and is reported to be in serious condition, they said.

According to the police, on Monday, the electric wire fell on a school bus carrying intellectually disabled children and then landed on the woman. The bus, which was carrying 14 children, was stationed near Old Jewargi Cross to pick up children. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

PM to lay MP river project foundation stone today

NEW DELHI, 24 DEC

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will on Wednesday lay the foundation stone of the Ken-Betwa River linking project, the first such initiative under the national river interlinking policy, at Khajuraho in Madhya Pradesh. Nearly 44 lakh people in 10 districts of Madhya Pradesh and 21 lakh in Uttar Pradesh will get drinking water under the project, which is estimated to cost Rs 44,605 crore, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav said on Tuesday. Nearly 7.18 lakh farmer families of 2,000 villages will be benefitted from the project, which will also generate 103MW of hydropower and 27 MW of solar energy, he said. The Ken-Betwa Link Project is a unique example of cooperation and coordination between the central government, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh, he said—*PTI*

Cong and AAP councillors clash with BJP in Chandigarh

Scuffle was over the vote tampering incident in January

CHANDIGARH, 24 DEC

A scuffle broke out between rival councillors in the Chandigarh Municipal Corporation House on Tuesday after they traded barbs over the vote tampering incident in January.

The trouble started when an AAP councillor flashed a poster targeting Anil Masih, a nominated councillor who in January as presiding officer was accused of tampering with ballot papers in the mayoral polls.

BJP councillors lashed out at AAP members. Masih got up from his seat and taking on the Congress benches said, "Rahul Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi are on bail". He hit out at them for trying to target him.

The Congress and AAP members then entered the Well with a poster of Masih and again started raising slogans against him.

During the pandemonium, a scuffle broke out between the Congress members and the BJP councillors, who tried to snatch the poster.

Mayor Kuldeep Kumar of AAP adjourned the meeting for a brief period and the House proceedings later resumed. When proceedings were to begin, Congress councillor Gurpreet Singh Gabi raised the issue of Union Home Minister Amit Shah's remarks on BR Ambedkar in Parliament recently.

He demanded that BJP should apologise over this. BJP councillors, however, hit back at the Congress, accusing it of being anti-Dalit. Later, AAP and Congress condemned Shah's remarks and said they were moving a resolution on the issue. —*PTI*

Ruckus inside the Chandigarh Municipal Corporation after a scuffle broke out between BJP and Congress-AAP councillors during a meeting, on Tuesday PHOTO: PTI

- Congress, AAP members entered the Well with a poster of Masih and started raising slogans against him. A scuffle broke out between the parties trying to snatch poster

CORRUPTION ALLEGATIONS

Lokpal calls SEBI chief, complainants for 'oral hearing'

NEW DELHI, 24 DEC

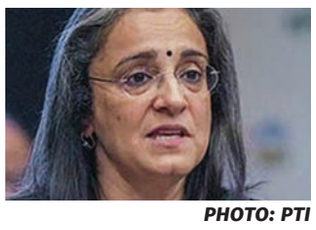


PHOTO: PTI

Anti-corruption ombudsman Lokpal has called SEBI chief Madhabi Puri Buch and also complainants, including TMC MP Mahua Moitra, for "oral hearing" next month in connection with corruption complaints being heard by it, alleging impropriety and conflict of interest on the basis of a Hindenburg Research report, according to an official order.

The Lokpal had on 8 November sought Buch's "explanation" on the complaints filed by Moitra, a Lok Sabha member, and two others. Buch, the chairperson of capital markets regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), was asked to submit her response within four weeks.

Hearing the case, the Lokpal said the named RPS (respondent public servant) "has filed her response by way of affidavit sworn on 07 December in time, raising preliminary issues as well as giving explanation allegation-wise".

"Further, we deem it appropriate that the RPS as well as the complainants can be given opportunity of oral hearing to clarify their positions taken in the complaints or the affidavit, as the case may be," according to the 19 December order signed by Lokpal chairperson Justice AM Khanwilkar and five other members. Lokpal asked the registry to issue notices to the RPS as well as the complainant(s) to avail of the opportunity of oral hearing on 28 January. —*PTI*

Shah calls for biometrics to identify bodies

NEW DELHI, 24 DEC

Union Home Minster Amit Shah on Tuesday stressed the need for using biometrics technology to identify unidentified bodies and unidentified "found persons". Chairing a review meeting on the implementation of the three new criminal laws with the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) here, Shah also emphasised the use of technology in all criminal investigation matters. He said alerts should be generated for all the cases at predefined stages and timelines should be fixed -- from the registration to disposal of the case -- for the benefit of victims and complainants. Biometrics technology should be adopted to identify unidentified bodies and unidentified found persons, Shah asserted. According to an official statement, Shah said regular dispatch of alerts to investigating officers as well as senior officers as per pre-defined timelines will help expedite the process of investigation. —*PTI*

Kerala priest criticises PM, BJP; church distances from remarks

THRISSUR, 24 DEC

A senior priest of the Orthodox Church in Kerala on Tuesday criticised the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi over their Christmas celebrations, pointing to the recent disruption of festivities at a school in Palakkad by VHP activists.

The sharp remarks from Yuhanon Mor Meletius, metropolitan of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church's Thrissur diocese, were shared on his social media handle a day after Modi attended Christmas celebrations hosted by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) in New Delhi.

The Church distanced itself from Meletius's remarks. Its head, Baselios Marthoma Mathews III, clarified that the metropolitan's views were his "opinions".

The controversy arose following the alleged disruption of Christmas celebrations at a school by local Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) activists and the destruction of a symbolic crib created by children at another school by unidentified miscreants in Palakkad district, sparking widespread protests across Kerala.

State government has formed a special police team to investigate the incidents. —*PTI*

Orthodox Church priest Yuhanon Mor Meletius PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

AMID INFLATION

Govt sleeping like Kumbhakaran: RaGa

NEW DELHI, 24 DEC

Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday said that the people are struggling with rising prices and are forced to compromise on small things of daily needs while the government is sleeping like 'Kumbhakaran'.

Gandhi shared a video on his social media handles on his recent visit to a vegetable market in Giri Nagar here and interaction with housewives who narrated their ordeal due to rising prices of food items.

"A few days ago, I went to a local vegetable market and while shopping with customers, I talked to the vendors to know how the budget of the common people is deteriorating and how inflation has troubled everyone," Gandhi said in his post accompanying the video.

"We discussed the prices of garlic, peas, mushrooms and other vegetables, and heard the real experiences of the people. How garlic at Rs 400 per kg and peas at Rs 120 per kg have shaken everyone's budget," he said.

He urged people to share their experiences with him if they are also feeling the effect of inflation.

In a post on X, Gandhi said, "'Garlic was once Rs 40, today it is Rs 400!' Rising inflation has spoiled the budget of the common person's kitchen - the government is sleeping like Kumbhakaran!"

In the over five-minute video, Gandhi is seen accompanying housewives as they buy vegetables and haggle with vendors. —*PTI*

NOTICE FOR MY REMOVAL WAS A RUSTED KNIFE: VP

NEW DELHI, 24 DEC

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Tuesday said one should not use a vegetable-cutting knife for bypass surgery and asserted that the notice for his removal from the post was actually a "rusted" tool.

Dhankhar said, "Just look at the notice against the vice president. Just look at the six links they have given.

The notice was rejected by Rajya Sabha Deputy Chair Harivansh.

"When I read it, I was astonished. But what surprised me more was that none of you read it. If you had, you wouldn't have been able to sleep for days," he told a group of women journalists.

Dhankhar said any constitutional position has to be vindicated by commitment to sublimity, sterling qualities and constitutionalism. —*PTI*

RSS Chief's temple-mosque remarks get mixed replies

PRAYAGRAJ, 24 DEC

Seers in Uttar Pradesh have expressed mixed views at Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat's remarks on the resurgence of temple-mosque disputes in the state.

While some favoured reclaiming temples, others felt such issues should be addressed within the constitutional framework.

Bhagwat recently expressed concern that some individuals, after the construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, are attempting to elevate themselves as "Hindu leaders" by raising new disputes over religious sites.

Responding to the RSS chief's remarks, head priest of Ayodhya's Ram temple Mahant Satyendra Das called for a decisive action to reclaim historical temple sites.

"If investigations reveal that Hindus were displaced and temples were taken over, efforts should be made to reclaim them. The chief minister's Yogi Adityanath's approach of identifying such sites and resuming worship is correct. Wherever temples exist, reclaiming them is justified," he told PTI.

Das, the head priest also said, "Temples are being discovered now. Why weren't such efforts made earlier? What the Chief Minister is doing now is appropriate."

Meanwhile, national secretary-general of the All India Sant Samiti, Swami Jitendranand Saraswati, backed his perspective on maintaining national harmony. He emphasised that India is not currently in a position to withstand any further internal strife. another civil war-like situation," Saraswati said. —*PTI*

Bhagwat said that some are attempting to elevate themselves as Hindu leaders by raising new disputes over religious sites PHOTO: PTI

We have to fight unitedly to win this battle: Dallewal

CHANDIGARH, 24 DEC

PHOTO: PTI

Punjab farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, whose fast unto death entered the 29th day on Tuesday, said they had to "fight unitedly to win this battle".

Dallewal, 70, has been sitting on a hunger strike at the Khanauri border since 26 November to put pressure on the Centre to accept the farmers' demands, including legal guarantee for minimum support price (MSP).

Addressing the farmers from the special stage made in view of his deteriorating health, Dallewal expressed heartfelt gratitude to those lending support to the agitation.

"I want to tell all of you that I am alright," he said in a frail voice as another farmer leader Abhimanyu Kohar helped him.

"We have to win this battle. This battle will be won only if the whole country fights unitedly," Dallewal said and appealed to Punjab's "younger brother Haryana" and other states that "this battle should be fought strongly".

Kohar later said that when Dallewal mentioned he was alright, he meant he might have grown physically weak but his spirit was high.

Doctors attending to Dallewal have described his condition as critical.

Farmers, under the banner of Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha, have been camping at the Shambhu and the Khanauri border points between Punjab and Haryana since 13 February. —*PTI*

Cal HC denies bail to ex-minister in recruitment scam

KOLKATA, 24 DEC

The Calcutta High Court has denied bail to former West Bengal education minister Partha Chatterjee and four other ex-public officials implicated in a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) case concerning a school jobs recruitment scandal. Justice Tapabrata Chakraborty upheld the rejection of bail for Chatterjee, former School Service Commission chairman Subires Bhattacharya, and others, agreeing with Justice Apurba Sinha Ray's previous ruling.

Justice Chakraborty highlighted the serious nature of the allegations, stressing their potential to undermine the credibility of the state's education system. The court noted the state's delay in sanctioning prosecution for some of the accused. —*PTI*

Man held for forging Waqf board docu in Indore

INDORE, 24 DEC

A man has been arrested in Indore for allegedly usurping properties belonging to the Madhya Pradesh Waqf Board through forgery. Nasir Khan was taken into custody on Monday following a complaint filed by the board. According to Assistant Commissioner of Police Tushar Singh, Khan allegedly created counterfeit documents, complete with fake seals and letterheads, to claim ownership of Waqf board properties. A significant quantity of forged seals and documents was seized during police searches of his home and office. Authorities charged Khan with fraud and the production of fake documents. —*PTI*

Court summons Owaisi over pro-Palestine slogan

BAREILLY, 24 DEC

A local court has summoned Asaduddin Owaisi, chief of the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM), to appear before it following allegations of violating the Constitution by raising pro-Palestine slogans during his oath-taking ceremony in Parliament.

Lawyer Virendra Gupta filed a petition against Owaisi, claiming that his remarks constituted a breach of constitutional and legal principles. Gupta expressed that he felt personally offended by Owaisi's statements, which he asserted contradicted the Constitution.

Gupta's petition was rejected by the MP/MLA court on 12 July. However, he subsequently filed a revision petition, which was accepted by District Judge Sudhir.

Owaisi took his oath as the Hyderabad MP on 25 June, during which he expressed support for Palestine from the podium. The Chairman of the House ordered that his remarks be expunged. Owaisi defended himself saying there was nothing inappropriate about his slogan: "Jai Bheem, Jai Meem, Jai Telangana, Jai Palestine". —*PTI*

Asaduddin Owaisi PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

PILIBHIT ENCOUNTER

Suspected Khalistanis from poor families

GURDASPUR, 24 DEC

The three suspected Khalistani terrorists killed in an encounter in Uttar Pradesh's Pilibhit hailed from poor families, with their kin finding it hard to believe they could be involved in anti-national activities.

Accused of being involved in the grenade attack at a police post in Gurdaspur recently, the three were killed in an encounter with police in Pilibhit on Monday.

The three suspected members of the Khalistan Zindabad Force (KZF) were identified as Varinder Singh alias Ravi, 23, of Agwan in Kalanaur, Gurwinder Singh (25) of Bhaini Bania Mohalla in Kalanaur and Jashanpreet Singh alias Partap Singh,18, of Shur Khurd in Kalanaur.

Gurwinder's family said he left home last week for Batala in Punjab. His phone was later found switched off; his family told reporters at their home.

"We cannot believe he could even think of doing such a thing," his father Gurdev Singh, a labourer, told reporters.

He said his son had been facing a police case after a youth had drowned in a canal. However, he claimed his son had been implicated in that case.

Gurwinder's mother Sarabjit Kaur said while leaving home for Batala to drop a relative he had said he will be back soon. "He was our only son... We dont know how he reached UP. Now, we have lost everything," she said.

Jashanpreet Singh also belonged to a poor family.

According to preliminary investigation revealed that this terror module is controlled by Pak-based Ranjeet Singh Nita, the chief of KZF, and operated by Greece-based Jaswinder Singh Mannu, a native of village Agwan village in Kalanaur. —*PTI*

Police personnel and others stand near the body of the terror suspect involved in the Gurdaspur grenade attack PHOTO: PTI

Stampede case: Cops grill Allu Arjun for 3 hrs

Cong MLC files plaint against 'Pushpa 2' crew for insulting police officials in the movie

Actor Allu Arjun arrives at the Chikkadpally police station for questioning as part of an ongoing probe into the stampede during the screening of his movie 'Pushpa 2', in Hyderabad, on Tuesday **PHOTO: PTI**

HYDERABAD, 24 DEC

Top Telugu actor Allu Arjun was on Tuesday grilled by police for over three hours when he appeared before them for questioning in connection with the death of a woman in a stampede during the screening of 'Pushpa-2' here on 4 December.

Arjun reached the Chikkadpally police station accompanied by his father Allu Aravind and lawyers a little after 11am and the questioning was held till 2.45pm. A police team led by Central Zone DCP Akshansh Yadav questioned the actor.

Tight security arrangements were made at the Chikkadpally police station in view of the star's appearance. Heavy police deployment was made, while police also imposed restrictions on traffic on the roads leading to the police station.

- Tight security arrangements were made at the Chikkadpally police station in view of the star's appearance. Heavy police deployment was made, while police also imposed restrictions on traffic on the roads leading to the police station

The actor was issued a notice on 23 December to appear before the police at 11am on Tuesday.

The notice to Allu Arjun on 23 December came a day after police commissioner CV Anand released a video showing the sequence of events at the theatre.

Allu Arjun, named as accused no 11, was arrested by the city police in connection with the death of the woman. The Telangana High Court granted him a four-week interim bail on the same day and he was released from a prison on 14 December.

Meanwhile, Congress MLC Chintapandu Naveen, popularly known as Theenmar Mallanna, has lodged a complaint with the Rachakonda Police against the actors, director, and producers of the movie Pushpa 2, alleging it contains scenes that insult police officials. The complaint, filed on Monday, cites specific scenes in the movie and alleges that police officials are portrayed as corrupt. It further states that the movie depicts a scene where the hero urinates in a swimming pool in which an IPS officer is present, which amounts to disrespecting the police force. *—PTI*

Murder accused held after 21 yrs on the run in M'rashtra

THANE, 24 DEC

A 55-year-old member of a criminal gang accused of robbery and murder in Maharashtra's Palghar has been arrested after evading capture for 21 years. Baburao Anna Kale, associated with the Pardhi gang, was apprehended on 20 December in his native village of Valkhed, Jalna district. The arrest stemmed from a 9 January, 2003, robbery at a bungalow in Virar, where four assailants bound the occupants and stole jewellery worth Rs 1.33 lakh and Rs 25,000 in cash. Despite one suspect being apprehended in 2005, Kale and two others remained at large. Recently, the Mira Bhayander-Vasai Virar crime branch initiated a renewed investigation, leading to tips about Kale's whereabouts. Upon his arrest, it emerged that he was linked to at least ten other crimes. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Shaan's Mumbai building catches fire, 80-yr-old hurt

MUMBAI, 24 DEC

A massive fire broke out at Singer Shaan's Bandra residence on Tuesday. The fire broke out in an apartment on the seventh floor of a multi-storey building. Upon receiving the alert, fire tenders rushed to the location and were able to bring the fire under control. An 80-year-old woman was found unconscious in the premises following the incident and was hospitalised, while fire personnel rescued nine persons from the building using a staircase, they said. An elderly woman, identified as Sira Paryani, 80, was found unconscious on the building's eighth floor. She was rushed to the nearby Bhabha Hospital for treatment and her condition was reported to be stable, another civic official said. *—PTI/ANI*

Rly prosecutes 304 men for using woman coaches

KOLKATA, 24 DEC

The Railway Protection Force (RPF) prosecuted 304 men for travelling in women-only train coaches in the Eastern Railway zone in a six-day drive as part of 'Operation Mahila Suraksha', an official said on Tuesday. The initiative, spearheaded by the RPF, focuses on protecting women passengers and ensuring their right to travel without fear or intimidation, he said. The ER official said that between 15 and 20 December, an intensive drive across Howrah, Sealdah, Malda and Asansol divisions of Eastern Railway led to the apprehension and prosecution of 304 men under the provisions of the Railway Act for unauthorised travel in women-only coaches. *—PTI*

Male govt teacher gets maternity leave in Bihar

PATNA, 24 DEC

A government teacher in Bihar applied for maternity leave, despite being a male, and after it got sanctioned, enjoyed a week-long holiday. The bizarre anomaly came to light when users of a portal, set up for government teachers applying for leave online, saved a screenshot and posted it on social media. However, authorities claim it was a "technical error" which would be set right and there was nothing to smell a rat. "It is a case of wrongful entry in the leave application format. The error is technical and will be rectified," said Archana Kumari, the education officer in charge of Mahua block in Vaishali district, where the teacher, Jitendra Kumar Singh, is posted. She agreed that maternity leaves were granted only to women, but pointed out that "even males get 'pitritva avakash' (paternity leave) to look after their newborns".. *—PTI*

IN EASTERN PROVINCE

India to fund Sri Lanka's ₹237 cr for dvpt projects

COLOMBO, 24 DEC

India is to provide Rs 2,371 million to Sri Lanka for 33 development projects in education, health and agriculture sectors in the eastern province, it was announced on Tuesday.

The cabinet has approved a proposal to sign an MoU to boost socio-economic development and bilateral ties between the two countries, cabinet spokesman and the Health Minister Nalinda Jayathissa told reporters here.

India is to provide Rs 315 million for education, Rs 780 million for health and Rs 620 million for agriculture under the arrangement.

These projects, among the slew of others, are aimed at enhancing infrastructure, growth and empowering local communities. *—PTI*

India is to provide Rs 315 million for education, Rs 780 million for health and Rs 620 million for agriculture **PHOTO: PTI**

Teen assaulted, urinated on in UP's Basti; kills self

BASTI, 24 DEC

A 17-year-old boy is reported to have taken his own life after a harrowing incident in which he was allegedly assaulted and humiliated by a group of men in the Captainganj area. According to local police, the accused, four men who have since been arrested, reportedly assaulted the boy and urinated on him, recording the act on video.

Superintendent of Police Krishna Gopal Chaudhury announced that the local station house officer (SHO) Deepak Kumar Dubey has been suspended, with departmental action initiated for failing to act on the family's complaint.

The boy, originally from Sant Kabir Nagar district and residing with his uncle in Basti, had been invited to a birthday party on the night of 20-21 December. Family members claim that, upon attending, he was stripped, beaten,

and forced to undergo demeaning treatment. According to the victim's mother, the perpetrators refused to delete the incriminating video, further exacerbating her son's distress.

Despite the family lodging a complaint at the Captainganj police station, no FIR was filed initially. On 25 December, overwhelmed by the traumatic experience, the boy tragically hanged himself.

In response to public outrage, local authorities took swift action, with the family bringing the boy's body to the police station to demand justice. *—PTI*

KERALA PANEL MEET EXPLORES NUCLEAR STATION

T'PURAM, 24 DEC

Kerala may potentially accommodate a nuclear power station, contingent on the state providing suitable land, a suggestion that arose during a recent high-level meeting between Union Power Minister Manohar Lal Khattar and Kerala's Power Minister K Krishnankutty.

Official sources disclosed that discussions focused on Kerala's memorandum advocating for the utilisation of the state's thorium deposits for power generation, which could then be supplied to Kerala. While the state did not formally request a nuclear power station, the suggestion from the Union Minister indicates a willingness to explore this option, should land be made available.

Khattar noted that Kerala faces challenges in boosting its domestic power production, largely relying on existing hydroelectric projects and electricity from neighbouring states. He acknowledged that such proposals involve extensive studies and inspections by various agencies.

Kerala's Power Minister Krishnankutty raised concerns regarding the state's growing power needs, estimating a requirement of nearly 10,000 MW by 2030, far exceeding the current 4,260 MW capacity.

The state has urged increased power supply from the central pool and a raise in the share from the Talcher Power Plant, alongside contract extensions for additional power supply. *—PTI*

'Sambhal Mosque survey report will be ready by Jan'

SAMBHAL, 24 DEC

The survey report of the Shahi Jama Masjid is almost complete and will be submitted in the court in January, 2025, the court-appointed commissioner recently said.

Advocate Ramesh Singh Raghav, who was appointed as the court commissioner in the matter, on 23 December said the report would be either filed on 2 or 3 January.

"The survey report of Shahi Jama Masjid is almost in the final stage and complete. There are some technical issues, which will be adjusted today. As it is the last working day of the court after which it will close. There is a stay order of the Supreme Court to the trial court not to take any action till 6 January hence the survey report will be filed before this date," Raghav told media persons.

On 24 November, during a second round of survey, protesting locals clashed with security personnel, leading to a major violence which led to death of four people and injuries to dozens. PTI

Budaun court to decide on Temple-Mosque plea on 18 Jan

Budaun, 24 DEC

A court will on January 18 decide whether it will hear a plea claiming the existence of Neelkanth temple at the Jama Masjid Shamsi mosque site in Budaun.

The dispute started in 2022 when Mukesh Patel, the then convener of Akhil Bharat Hindu Mahasabha, claimed the temple existed at the mosque site and sought permission to worship in the structure. *—PTI*

Heavy security deployed at Shahi Jama Masjid during prayers, in Sambhal **PHOTO: PTI**

AMID FESTIVE SEASON

Beef shortage looms in Goa amid strike against cow vigilantism

PANAJI, 24 DEC

Goa is bracing for a potential beef shortage as meat traders in the state have initiated a strike protesting against what they describe as increased harassment from cow vigilante groups. The shutdown commenced on Monday under the auspices of the Quraishi Meat Traders Association (QMTA).

In a letter addressed to Chief Minister Pramod Sawant, the association expressed concerns over rising violence from right-wing Hindu organisations targeting legal beef vendors. Abdul Bepari, a member of QMTA, recounted a recent incident in Margao, demanding government action and protection against these groups. He lamented that police have been unresponsive to numerous complaints, stating that the strike would persist until the government assures their safety.

Official reports indicate that Goa sells approximately 20-25 tonnes of beef daily, with sales typically surging during the tourist and festive seasons. Congress MLA Carlos Alvares Ferreira highlighted the growing problem of vigilantism in the state, asserting that anyone, including meat traders, should act in accordance with the law.

Ferreira noted alarming incidents where mobs intruded into homes searching for beef, calling such actions a violation of property rights, while emphasising that self-appointed vigilantes lack authority to inspect meat shops.

In response to the crisis, Chief Minister Sawant announced that the state-run Goa Meat Complex Limited would address the beef supply needs, assuring that the complex provides hygienic beef options. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

2 found dead in parked caravan in Kerala

KOZHIKODE, 24 DEC

Two people have been found dead in a caravan parked along the roadside near Vadakara town in this north Kerala district, police said on Tuesday.

The bodies of the men, identified as Manoj, the driver of the caravan, and another person, Joel, were discovered in the caravan parked at Karimapanapalam on Monday evening.

The caravan had reportedly been parked at the location since Sunday night, which had attracted the attention of locals.

Upon examination, one body was found lying near the door. When the police arrived and conducted further inspection, the other body was discovered on the vehicle's berth.

Police said the investigation into the incident is ongoing. Forensic teams, fingerprint experts, and the dog squad are conducting examinations at the scene.

At the same time, there is no confirmation yet that carbon monoxide inhalation was the cause of death. *—PTI*

Jaipur inferno toll hits 15, cops quiz tanker driver

JAIPUR, 24 DEC

The driver of an LPG tanker that was involved in an explosion here last week which claimed 15 lives has appeared before police and will be questioned by the Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing the case, a senior official said on Tuesday.

The driver, Jaiveer, 40, a resident of Mathura in Uttar Pradesh, managed to get out of the tanker in time after sensing the impact of the collision, which broke the tanker's outlet nozzles.

According to police, Jaiveer called Delhi-based tanker owner Anil Panwar after the incident and then switched off his phone.

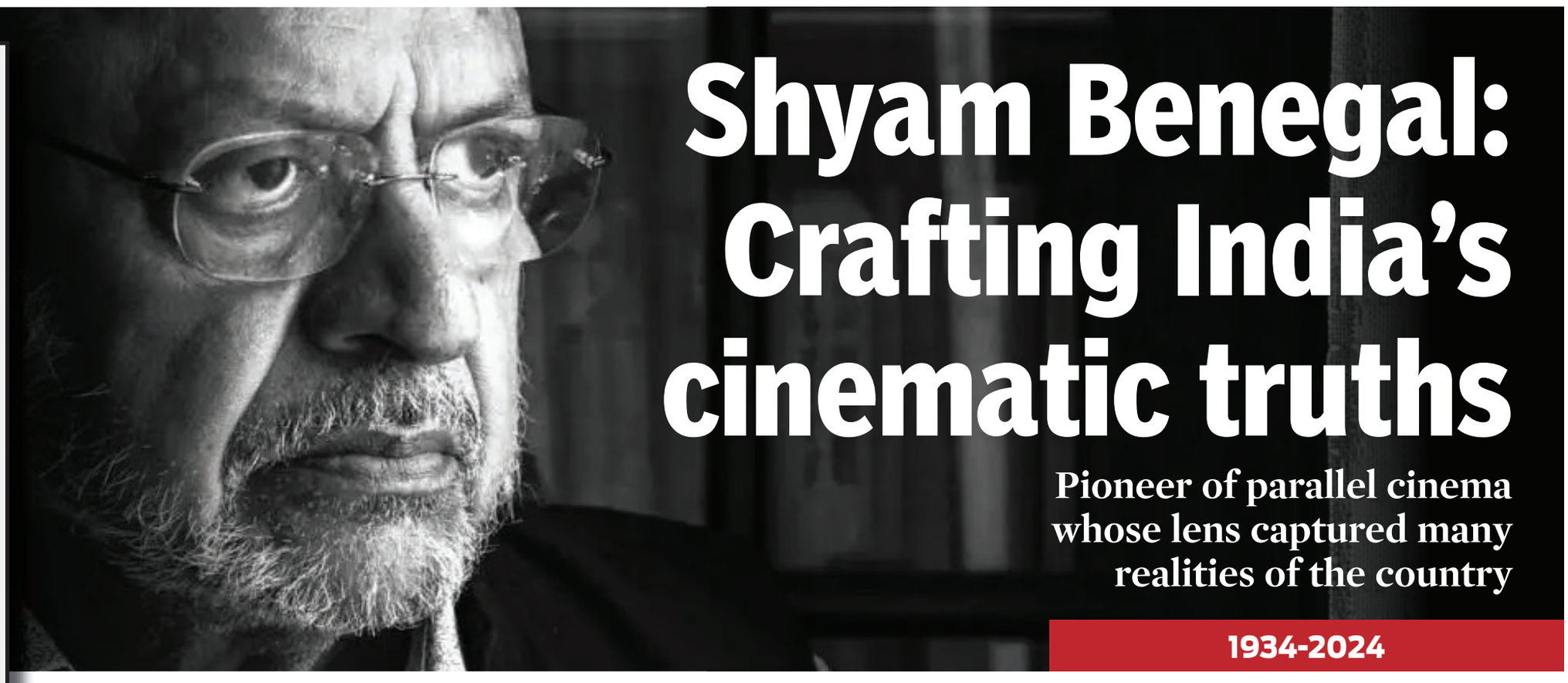
Jaiveer appeared before police on Monday. The SIT probing the case will question Jaiveer, Panwar and the tanker company about the vehicle's condition and the driver's employment history, he added.

The DCP said Jaiveer was among the nine drivers present at the accident scene who managed to escape.

The container truck collided with the tanker while taking a U-turn on the Jaipur-Ajmer highway, breaking its outlet nozzles which released a white cloud of gas.

The Rajasthan High Court has taken suo motu cognisance of the matter and sought replies from the state government and the Centre. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X



Shyam Benegal: Crafting India's cinematic truths

Pioneer of parallel cinema whose lens captured many realities of the country

1934-2024

We have lost another stalwart of the Film Industry today

-AMITABH BACHCHAN
Actor

Made my world so special and saw in me something that no one else did

-NAFISA ALI, Actor

He has been my guru in everything, not just in acting but in the way I view the world.

-SHABANA AZMI, Actor

It took Shyam Benegal's genius to see me beyond my looks

-MANOJ BAJPAYEE, Actor

India has lost the most humane storyteller of our time, and I've lost a guru.

-KAMAL HAASAN, Actor

He discovered & nurtured some of the brightest film talents of India

-CHIRANJEEVI, Actor

He gave a new thought process to Hindi cinema, there is no doubt about that, such people are rare

-JAVED AKHTAR, Lyricist

His lens empathetic, rooted to Indian reality and always political, Shyam Benegal was the arthouse pioneer who rewrote the rules of cinema with films such as 'Ankur', 'Nishant' and 'Bhumika' that blazed an alternate path to mainstream movies.

The pioneer of parallel cinema, one of India's greatest directors whose work found an audience in the most discerning of global film circles, died in a Mumbai hospital on Monday evening. It was just nine days after he celebrated his 90th birthday.

Benegal, who burst on the scene with his first film 'Ankur' in 1974, was a chronicler of India's times and politics, that rare artiste who worked both in non-fiction and fiction across varied mediums -- films, documentaries, biopics and ambitious TV shows.

The title of his debut film, translating to seedling, was perhaps prophetic. 'Ankur', which delves into feudalism and exploitation of women in a small village in India, prepared the ground for a cinema without artifice in an era dominated by superman heroes and loud song and dance routines. It was the first of his more than 25 films that included 'Mandi', 'Manthan', 'Junoon', 'Kalyug' and 'Zubeidaa'.

The remarkable oeuvre boasts the documentary on another great, 'Satyajit Ray, Filmmaker', and televisions shows, the ambitious 'Bharat Ek Khoj', based on Jawaharlal Nehru's book 'Discovery of India', and 'Samvidhaan', a 10-part serial on the making of the Constitution.

The filmmaking was both deeply personal and inherently political. Telling stories of class and caste struggles, feminist concerns, rural distress and community dynamics. The gaze was incisive, the themes serious and the treatment sometimes sombre and other times satirical.

If 'Kalyug' is a modern day retelling of the Mahabharata, 'Bhumika' is a searing profile of a woman filmstar and her often exploitative relationships, 'Mandi' deals with a brothel and its occupants who deftly navigate the men in their lives and 'Welcome to Sajjanpur' about an aspiring novelist turned letter writer is an outright satire.

Fondly called Shyam Babu by friends and colleagues, Benegal was a pillar of meaningful cinema of the 1970s and 1980s alongside Sai Paranjpye, Govind Nihalani, Mani Kaul, Saeed Akhtar Mirza, and Kumar Shahani.

Benegal disliked the term 'middle cinema' used to bracket his films and preferred that his work be called 'new or alternate cinema'.

The late playwright Vijay Tendulkar wrote the screenplay 'Manthan', a film on the milk cooperative movement in Anand, Gujarat, made with Rs 2 funding from five lakh farmers, and 'Nishant', set in a feudal family. The late music composer Vanraj Bhatia, cinematographer Govind Nihalani and the great theatre director Satyadev Dubey worked with him in multiple films. Girish Karnad wrote the screenplay for 'Bhumika' and Ruskin Bond for 'Junoon'.

'There are people who have done wonderful things. There's nothing unique in what one has done. You do what you think you want to do. That's not unique. Climbing Mount Everest is unique,' he said.

Interestingly, Mahatma Gandhi was the one personality Benegal explored in all his complexities and significance. In 'The Making of the Mahatma', Rajit Kapoor portrayed Gandhi during his South African years. Gandhi appeared in two episodes of 'Bharat Ek Khoj' and was played by Neeraj Kabi in 10-part series 'Samvidhaan'. In his biopic on Netaji, 2005's ' Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose: The Forgotten Hero', the role of Gandhi was enacted by Surendra Rajan.

The beginnings of the extraordinary career in the moving visual began in advertising.

And it was probably in his genes. Born in Tirumalagiri, now in Telangana, Benegal grew up with cinema around him. His father was a still photographer who also made short films. He was also a second cousin of film legend Guru Dutt.

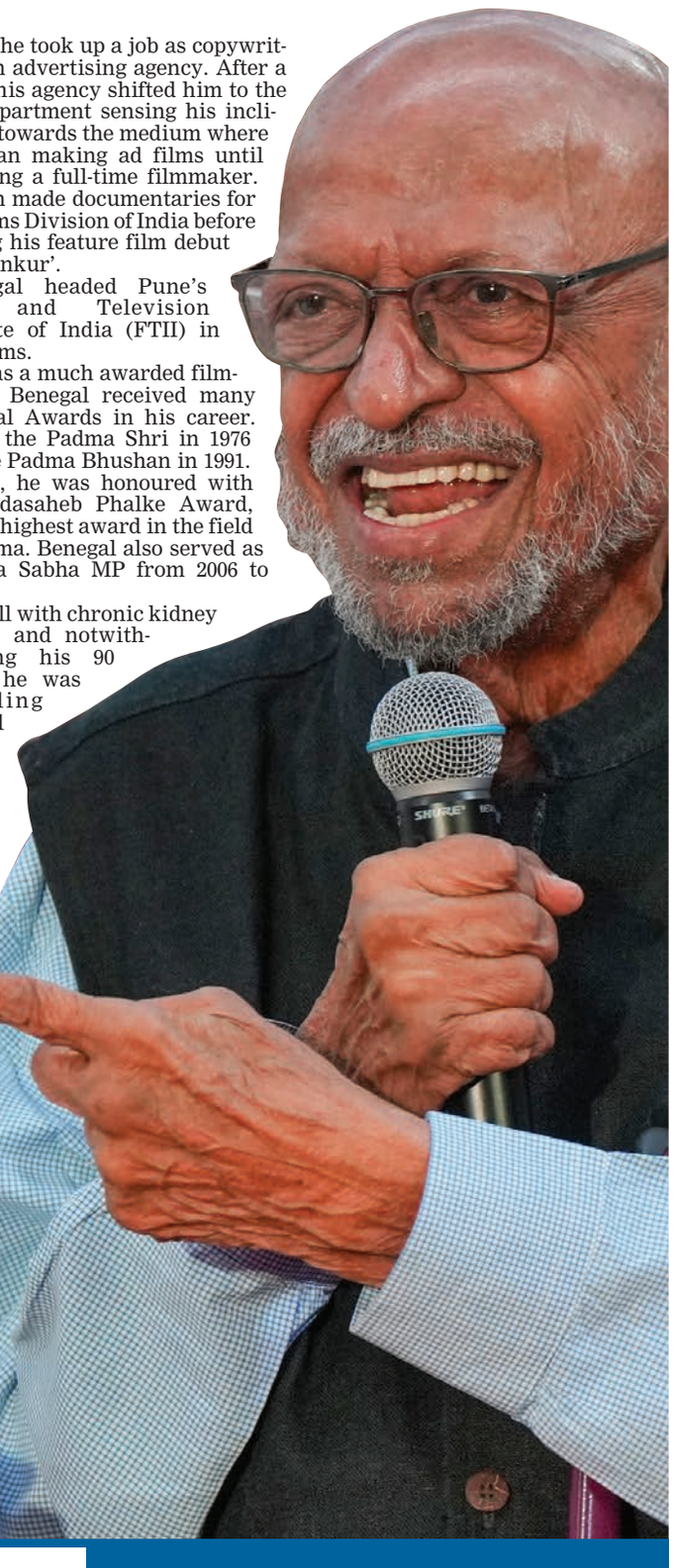
Benegal did his masters in economics from Hyderabad's Osmania University. He planned to take up teaching but decided against it. The young Benegal soon moved to Mumbai looking for work and initially thought about assisting Guru Dutt but gave up on that as he had his own ideas.

Next, he took up a job as copywriter at an advertising agency. After a while, his agency shifted him to the film department sensing his inclination towards the medium where he began making ad films until becoming a full-time filmmaker. He then made documentaries for the Films Division of India before making his feature film debut with 'Ankur'.

Benegal headed Pune's Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) in two terms.

He was a much awarded filmmaker. Benegal received many National Awards in his career. He got the Padma Shri in 1976 and the Padma Bhushan in 1991. In 2005, he was honoured with the Dadasaheb Phalke Award, India's highest award in the field of cinema. Benegal also served as a Rajya Sabha MP from 2006 to 2012.

Unwell with chronic kidney disease and notwithstanding his 90 years, he was unwilling to call it a day. — *PTI*



CAREER HITS

- NISHAAN
- BHUMIKA
- ANKUR
- JUNOON
- MANDI
- MANTHAN
- KALYUG

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

IT hiring: 2025 promises rebound; AI/data science to dominate job mkt

The hiring landscape for fresh graduates remained subdued, with growth rates ranging from 2-15 per cent across various tech sectors **PHOTO: FREEPIK**

Indian IT hiring landscape is at a pivotal juncture as it transitions from a year of decline towards a more hopeful future. The focus on specialised skills, particularly in AI and data science, combined with geographical shifts towards Tier 2 cities, indicates a transformation within the sector.

While the IT hiring landscape in India in 2024 was marked by delayed onboarding and a decline in overall hiring activity, the outlook for 2025 appears promising with expectations of recovery and growth fuelled by improvements in economic conditions and technological advancements.

In 2024, the Indian IT sector experienced approximately a 7 per cent decline in hiring compared to the previous year, largely due to broader macroeconomic challenges and global uncertainties.

Sunil Chemmankotil, Country Manager of Adecco India, noted that while Global Capability Centres (GCCs) played a crucial role in boosting hiring -- accounting for 52.6 per cent of job openings for tech professionals -- they could not fully offset the significant downturn in the IT services sector.

Despite this overall contraction, certain areas showed resilience and growth.

The demand for roles in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) surged by 39 per cent, reflecting a shift towards more specialised skill sets as organisations prioritised these technologies, according to Adecco research.

There was notable growth in IT hiring within Tier 2 cities, which saw an impressive 48 per cent increase during the third quarter of 2024, indicating a trend of geographic diversification of job opportunities beyond traditional tech hubs.

Hiring for professionals with mid- to senior-level experience increased by 35 per cent, suggesting that companies favour experienced candidates amid market fluctuations.

The hiring landscape for fresh graduates remained subdued, with growth rates ranging from 2-15 per cent across various tech sectors, data from TeamLease Edtech showed.

Companies often delayed onboarding campus hires due to uncertain deal flows, which industry leaders believe was particularly influenced by the global political climate surrounding major elections.

As India moves into 2025, there are encouraging signs that the IT hiring landscape may rebound significantly.

According to the ManpowerGroup Employment Outlook Survey (MEOS) for first quarter of 2025, 53 per cent of the 3,150 employers in India surveyed expect an increase in hiring, the highest among the 42 countries studied.

'In 2024, fresher hiring remained muted in general with several companies also choosing to delay the onboarding of their campus hires. This may change as the deal flow for large projects is expected to return in early 2025. The first set of deal flow will benefit the large players and as the buyer sentiment improves, the tier 2 and 3 players can expect a rise in orders,' Jaideep Kewalramani, COO and Head of Employability Business at TeamLease Edtech, said.

- As India moves into 2025, there are encouraging signs that the IT hiring landscape may rebound significantly

As the macro headwinds slow down and the results of elections of large economies, the US being the last one in 2024 to come in, he said organisations will be confident about the economic outlook and start to make some bets on the capital investments, which will help jump-start the deal flow in early 2025.

While fresh hiring may remain subdued initially, it is anticipated that as large projects commence in early 2025, there will be a notable increase in job opportunities for new graduates, Kewalramani said.

Companies are expected to invest heavily in upskilling their workforce to meet evolving demands, particularly in areas such as AI and cybersecurity.

Wipro CTO Sandhya Arun believes enterprises are set to accelerate the integration of AI and other advanced technologies to unlock significant business value.

'Year 2025 promises to be a year of high-velocity technology disruptions, offering new opportunities and presenting unprecedented challenges. The future belongs to enterprises that embrace technology and disruption...' Arun said.

The demand for specialised tech roles is anticipated to surge by 30-35 per cent, driven by an increasing reliance on emerging technologies.

'However, the shift towards AI and automation in India's IT sector has started and will continue to create increasing impact on recruitment through AI-driven tools machine learning, and redefined job roles by automating routine tasks while creating demand for highly specialised roles,' said Sanju Ballurkar, President (Experis India), ManpowerGroup India.

The sector is expected to rebound with projections indicating a 15-20 per cent growth in job opportunities across various industries, according to Chemmankotil. —*PTI*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Ex-US prez Bill Clinton hospitalised for fever

WASHINGTON DC, 24 DEC

Former US president Bill Clinton, 78, has been admitted to Georgetown University Medical Centre in Washington DC, after developing a fever, his spokesperson Angel Urena announced. Clinton is reportedly in good spirits and receiving good care. While the situation is "not urgent," sources told that the former president is awake and alert, with recovery expected.

This marks another health scare for Clinton, who has faced heart issues in the past, including a quadruple bypass in 2004 and a procedure to clear a clogged artery in 2010. In 2021, he was hospitalized for six days due to a blood infection. Recently, Clinton was active on the campaign trail and published his latest book, 'Citizen: My Life after the White House'.

—Agencies

Tonga elects new PM after former's resignation

PERTH, 24 DEC

Tonga's parliament elected Aisake Eke as the new Prime Minister during a special session on Christmas Eve, following the resignation of his predecessor, Siaosi Sovaleni, ahead of a no-confidence vote. Eke, a former finance minister, secured his position with a 16-8 vote against Trade Minister Viliame Latu. Eke's appointment comes less than a year before the next election for the South Pacific island nation, which has faced challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and the aftermath of the devastating 2022 volcanic eruption and tsunami. Eke, who previously served in various prominent roles and returned to parliament in 2021, is expected to spearhead preparations for the 2031 Pacific Games in Tonga. *—PTI*

US voices concern over sentencing 25 civilians by Pak

SAN FRANCISCO, 24 DEC

The United States expressed alarm regarding the recent sentencing of 25 civilians by a military court in Pakistan. State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller criticised the proceedings, citing a lack of judicial independence, transparency, and due process. "The United States is deeply concerned that Pakistani civilians have been sentenced by a military tribunal for their involvement in protests on 9 May 2023," he said, urging Pakistani authorities to uphold the constitutional right to a fair trial. Critics of the US response included Richard Grenell, a close aide of President-elect Donald Trump, who labelled the statement as "too little and too weak," demanding the release of former Prime Minister Imran Khan. Indian American Congressman Ro Khanna echoed Grenell's sentiments, advocating for new democratic elections in Pakistan. Former US envoy Zalmay Khalilzad also called for increased pressure on Pakistan to reach a political agreement and secure Khan's release. *—PTI*

Blast at Turkish factory kills at least 12 people

ISTANBUL, 24 DEC

An explosion at an armament factory in northwest Turkiye left at least 12 dead and four injured Tuesday morning. The blast occurred in the capsule production facility of the factory located in the province of Balikesir, according to the state-run Anadolu Agency. Balikesir Governor Ismail Ustaoglu said the explosion collapsed the capsule production building and that the surrounding buildings sustained minor damage. Authorities have opened an investigation. *—PTI*

B'desh opens $5B graft probe against Hasina

Along with Hasina, her son, niece and UK Treasury Minister is also questioned

DHAKA, 24 DEC

An anti-graft panel in Bangladesh has launched an investigation against former prime minister Sheikh Hasina and her family in connection with the allegations of embezzling USD 5 billion in the Rooppur nuclear power plant, according to a media report.

Indian companies are participating in constructing the Rooppur nuclear power plant which is being built by Rosatom, Russia's state-run corporation, in Bangladesh.

The first Bangladeshi nuclear power plant, the Russian-designed Rooppur, is being built 160 km west of the Bangladeshi capital of Dhaka.

Rosatom has refuted the "provocative statements" in the media about the Rooppur NPP project.

Along with Hasina, her son, Sajeeb Wazed Joy, and Tulip Siddiq, her niece and the UK's Treasury minister, were also questioned, BDNews reported on Sunday.

There are accusations of embezzling USD 5 billion in the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant project, the report added.

Sheikh Hasina Hasina has been living in India since 5 August following a massive student-led protest that toppled her 16-year regime *PHOTO: X*

The development came two days after the High Court issued a rule asking why the Anti-Corruption Commission's (ACC) inaction over an alleged transfer of USD 5 billion from the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant project to a Malaysian bank by Hasina, Joy, and Tulip should not be declared illegal, the report added.

According to ACC documents, the allegations of corruption in the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant project were brought to light by Bobby Hajjaj, chairman of the National Democratic Movement (NDM).

Hasina, 77, has been living in India since 5 August when she fled the country following a massive student-led protest that toppled her 16-year regime.

Her sister Rehana accompanied her. Joy resides in the US, while her niece Tulip is a member of the British parliament. Bangladesh-based International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) has issued arrest warrants for Hasina and several former Cabinet ministers, advisers, and military and civil officials for "crimes against humanity and genocide".

Refuting the allegations, the Russian Corporation said that it is committed to a policy of openness and the principle of combating corruption in all its projects and maintains a transparent procurement system.

"Rosatom State Corporation refutes provocative statements about the implementation of the Rooppur NPP project that have appeared in the media," it said. *—PTI*

SULLIVAN, YUNUS EXPRESS COMMITMENT TO UPHOLD HUMAN RIGHTS

WASHINGTON, 23 DEC

US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and Bangladesh interim government's Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus and expressed their commitment to respecting and protecting the human rights of all.

Sullivan also thanked Yunus for his leadership of Bangladesh during a challenging period, according to a press release issued by the US government. It said that both leaders expressed their commitment to respecting and protecting the human rights of all people, regardless of religion. Sullivan also reiterated the US support for a prosperous, stable, and democratic Bangladesh, and offered his country's continued support in meeting the challenges that the South Asian nation faces.

Jake Sullivan *PHOTO: X*

There has been a spate of incidents of violence against Hindus and other minorities, as well as attacks on temples in Bangladesh after the fall of the Hasina government.

On 13 December, the White House said that President Joe Biden is closely monitoring the situation in Bangladesh and the US will hold the country's interim government accountable for ensuring the protection of religious and ethnic minorities. *—PTI*

Israel confirms Hamas leader's death, warns Houthis

JERUSALEM, 24 DEC

Israel's Defence Minister has confirmed that the country was responsible for the assassination of Hamas' top leader last summer and has issued threats against the leadership of the Houthi rebel group in Yemen.

Israel Katz's comments represent the first official acknowledgment of the killing of Ismail Haniyeh, who died in an explosion in Iran last July. While Israel's involvement was long suspected, leaders had only hinted at it previously.

In a speech on Monday, Katz warned that the Houthis would face a similar fate to that of Hamas and Hezbollah leaders, including Haniyeh. He affirmed Israel's ongoing military operations, stating, "We will strike the Houthis' strategic infrastructure and cut off the head of the leadership."

Houthis have launched numerous missiles and drones at Israel since the outbreak of conflict. *—PTI*

NETANYAHU HINTS AT PROGRESS ON GAZA DEAL

JERUSALEM, 24 DEC

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has signalled to lawmakers that an agreement about the war on Gaza could be nearing.

He told the Knesset he does not know how long it will take and that he cannot divulge details, but that his administration is taking action to bring the captives back. Talks about a truce have heated up in recent days as Israel and Hamas have held indirect talks in Doha mediated by Qatar, Egypt and the United States.

Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine said progress is made after meeting on Saturday. *—Agencies*

US GAY COUPLE GETS 100 YEARS FOR RAPING THEIR ADOPTED SONS

GEORGIA, 24 DEC

A gay couple William, 34, and Zachary 36, have been sentenced to 100 years in prison each without the chance of parole from Georgia after they were convicted of sexually abusing their adopted sons as reported in the New York post quoting the Walton County District Attorney's office.

They adopted them from a Christian special-needs agency. The children who were 12 and 10, raised by the gay couple under the guise of a happy family in the affluent Atlanta suburb.

He added, "However, the depth of the Defendants' depravity, which is as deep as it gets, is not greater than the resolve of those that fought for justice and the strength of the victims in this case."

William and Zachary were arrested in 2022.

One of their friends told police that Zachary shared images of one of the boys being abused on Snap chat and wrote, "I'm going to f*** my son tonight. Stand by". *—Agencies*

US CHAOS

Biden inks Bill amid transgender care ban row

WASHINGTON, 24 DEC

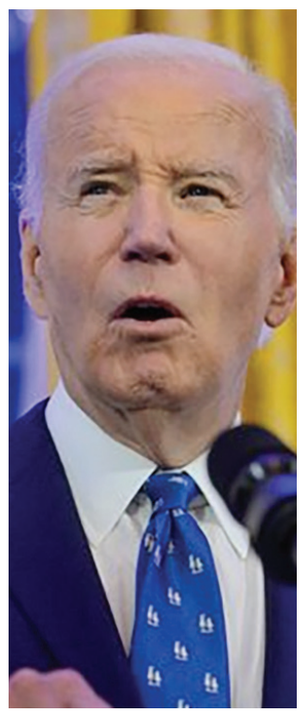
- Annual defence Authorisation Bill, which directs Pentagon policy, provides a 14.5 per cent pay raise for junior enlisted service members and a 4.5 per cent increase for others.

US President Joe Biden on Monday signed into law a defence bill that authorises significant pay raises for junior enlisted service members, aims to counter China's growing power and boosts overall military spending to USD 895 billion despite his objections to language stripping coverage of transgender medical treatments for children in military families.

Biden said his administration strongly opposes the provision because it targets a group based on gender identity and "interferes with parents' roles to determine the best care for their children." He said it also undermines the all-volunteer military's ability to recruit and retain talent.

"No service member should have to decide between their family's health care access and their call to serve our nation," the president said in a statement. The Senate forwarded the bill to Biden after passing it last week by a vote of 85-14. In the House, a majority of Democrats voted against the bill after House Speaker insisted on adding the provision to ban transgender medical care for children. Biden also objected to other language in the Bill prohibiting the use of money earmarked to transfer detainees held at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, tand into the US.

Annual defence authorisation bill, which directs Pentagon policy, provides a 14.5 per cent pay raise for junior enlisted service members and a 4.5 per cent increase for others. *—PTI*



Joe Biden *PHOTO: X*

Trump to rename US tallest peak

WASHINGTON, 24 DEC

President-elect Donald Trump has once again suggested he wants to revert the name of North America's tallest mountain — Alaska's Denali — to Mount McKinley, wading into a sensitive and decades-old conflict about what the peak should be called.

Former president Barack Obama changed the name to Denali in 2015 to reflect the traditions of Alaska Natives as well as the preference of many Alaska residents. Trump suggested in 2016 that he might undo Obama's action, but he dropped that notion after Alaska's senators objected. He raised it again during a rally in Phoenix on Sunday. *—PTI*

American Airlines resumes operations after tech issue

NEW YORK, 24 DEC

American Airlines flights were cleared to fly by regulators early Tuesday after a brief grounding due to a system-wide technical issue.

Just before 7am Eastern time, the Federal Aviation Administration ordered all American Airlines flights grounded in the US at the airline's request. American had reported a technical issue affecting its entire system with millions traveling for the holiday.

In social media replies to frustrated travelers, the airline said: "Our team is currently working to rectify this. Your continued patience is appreciated." A post on the Federal Aviation Administration's website acknowledged the airline's request for a "nationwide groundstop" for all American Airlines planes and their subsidiary airlines. *—PTI*

South Korea's Opposition party plans to impeach interim PM

SEOUL, 24 DEC

South Korea's main Opposition party, the Democratic Party, announced plans to impeach acting Prime Minister Han Duck-soo after he failed to meet a deadline for approving independent investigations into the impeachment of President Yoon Suk Yeol and his wife. Should impeachment proceedings proceed, it would exacerbate the country's ongoing political crisis, which has already been heightened by Yoon's controversial martial law declaration on 3 December.

Han, who has assumed presidential powers following Yoon's impeachment, is facing accusations from the Democratic Party, which holds a parliamentary majority, over vetoing numerous opposition-sponsored bills and failing to fill vital vacancies on the Constitutional Court.

South Korea has been facing violence across the nation in the aftermath of the controversial martial law row *PHOTO: X*

The court's rulings will be critical in determining Yoon's potential reinstatement.

Democratic Party floor leader Park Chan-dae expressed party's determination to push forward with impeachment, stating that Han's legacy will hinge on whether he sides with the public or with Yoon, whom they accuse of rebellion and abuse of power. *—PTI*

USD1 MILLION BOUNTY

Hong Kong issues warrants for 6 activists

HONG KONG, 24 DEC

Hong Kong police on Tuesday announced a fresh round of arrest warrants for six activists based overseas, with bounties set at USD 1 million Hong Kong dollars for information leading to their arrests.

According to the warrants, the six are wanted for national security offences such as secession, subversion and collusion with foreign forces. They include Tony Chung, the former leader of now-defunct pro-independence group Studentlocalism.

UK-based Carmen Lau, a former district councillor and current activist with the Hong Kong Democracy Council, as well as Chloe Cheung, an activist with the Committee for Freedom in Hong Kong, also had warrants issued against them.

The six are wanted for national security offences such as secession, subversion and collusion with foreign forces *PHOTO: X*

The latest round of warrants signals that the Hong Kong government is targeting vocal critics based abroad.

The government had previously issued two rounds of arrest warrants and bounties for more prominent activists, including ex-lawmakers Ted Hui and Nathan Law.

The increasing number of wanted individuals abroad come as Hong Kong continues to crack down on political dissent following massive anti-government protests in 2019 that resulted in a wave of pro-democracy movements. Many outspoken pro-democracy activists have since been jailed, with others fleeing abroad. "The Hong Kong government's latest round of arrest warrants and bounties against six Hong Kong activists is a cowardly act of intimidation that aims to silence Hong Kong people," said Maya Wang, associate China director at Human Rights Watch.

Separately on Tuesday, the Hong Kong government issued orders for the cancellation of passports belonging to seven "absconders", including ex-lawmakers Hui and Dennis Kwok, who are wanted under the security law. *—PTI*

UN: Syria receptive to probe of Assad crimes

UNITED NATIONS, 24 DEC

The UN organisation assisting in investigating the most serious crimes in Syria said Monday the country's new authorities were "very receptive" to its request for cooperation during a just-concluded visit to Damascus, and it is preparing to deploy.

The visit led by Robert Petit, head of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria, was the first since the organisation was established by the UN General Assembly in 2016.

It was created to assist in evidence-gathering and prosecution of individuals responsible for possible war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide since Syria's civil war began in 2011.

Petit highlighted the urgency of preserving documents and other evidence before it is lost. Since the rebel overthrow of Assad and the rebel opening of prisons and detention facilities there have been rising demands from Syrians for the prosecution of those responsible for atrocities and killings while he was in power.

"The fall of the Assad rule is a significant opportunity for us to fulfil our mandate on the ground," Petit said. "Time is running out. There is a small window of opportunity to secure these sites and the material they hold."

UN associate Spokesperson said investigative team "is preparing for an operational deployment as early as possible and as soon as it is authorised to conduct activities on Syrian soil." *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Gold falls ₹78,600 per 10g, silver jumps ₹500

NEW DELHI, 24 DEC

Gold price slipped Rs 100 to Rs 78,600 per 10 grams in the national capital on Tuesday, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal had closed at Rs 78,700 per 10 grams in the previous trading session. However, silver jumped Rs 500 to Rs 90,500 per kg against the previous close of Rs 90,000 per kg. The price of 99.5 per cent purity gold dipped Rs 100 to Rs 78,200 per 10 grams on Tuesday. Meanwhile, in futures trade on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), gold contracts for February rose Rs 35 or 0.05 per cent to trade at Rs 76,179 per 10 grams. Silver contracts for March delivery went lower by Rs 87 or 0.1 per cent to Rs 89,031 per kg. Globally, Comex gold futures traded flat at USD 2,628.30 per ounce. *—PTI*

DGCA imposes ₹10 lakh fine on Akasa Air

MUMBAI, 24 DEC

Aviation regulator DGCA has slapped a Rs 10 lakh penalty on Akasa Air for failing to provide compensation on time to some passengers who were denied boarding at the Bengaluru airport in September, according to a source. In recent months, the more than two-and-a-half-year-old airline has come under the scanner of the regulator for certain alleged violations. Some pilots had also flagged concerns about training at the carrier, which has termed the allegations as baseless. The aircraft, which was to operate the flight, was grounded on account of foreign object damage. *—PTI*

Greaves Electric Mobility aims to raise ₹1,000 cr

NEW DELHI, 24 DEC

Electric Vehicle maker Greaves Electric Mobility Ltd has filed the draft papers with capital markets regulator Sebi to raise funds through an initial public offering (IPO). The IPO is a combination of a fresh issue of equity shares worth Rs 1,000 crore and an Offer for Sale (OFS) of 18.9 crore shares by the selling shareholders, according to the draft papers filed on Monday. Under the OFS, promoter Greaves Cotton will divest 5.1 crore equity shares and an investor Abdul Latif Jameel Green Mobility Solutions DMCC will offload 13.8 crore shares. Greaves Electric is recognised for its 'Ampere' brand of electric scooters and also produces three-wheelers under a separate brand name. The company may consider raising Rs 200 crore through a pre-IPO placement. If such placement is undertaken, the fresh issue will be reduced. *—PTI*

Mahindra, PNB ties up for dealer finance solutions

NEW DELHI, 24 DEC

Mahindra Tractors, a part of Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd, on Tuesday said it has partnered with Punjab National Bank to provide channel finance solutions to its dealers. The two partners have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), the company said in a statement. As part of this partnership, all Mahindra Tractors' dealers with a business vintage of over one year are eligible for the channel finance limit. The program offers a finance limit of up to Rs 5 crore, with limit assessments based on 105 days of sales, it added. Dealers will benefit from a 105-day credit period, with an additional 15-day grace period, and enjoy 100 per cent funding of the Mahindra & Mahindra invoice without any margin requirements, the company said. *—PTI*

Market settles flat in volatile trade; metal stocks drag

Nifty dips 25 points and Sensex declines 67.30 points

NEW DELHI, 24 DEC

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty ended on a flat note in a volatile trade on Tuesday, as investors preferred to stay on the sidelines awaiting further triggers amid persistent foreign fund outflows.

After gyrating between highs and lows, the 30-share index declined 67.30 points or 0.09 per cent to settle at 78,472.87. During the day, it dropped 142.38 points or 0.18 per cent to 78,397.79.

The NSE Nifty dipped 25.80 points or 0.11 per cent to 23,727.65.

As many as 2,019 stocks declined, while 1,977 advanced and 96 remained unchanged on the BSE.

"The domestic market concluded flat ahead of the holiday, with metal and power stocks dragging performance while FMCG and auto sectors gained from recent corrections. "The near-term market trajectory hinges on the outcome of Q3 results and the Union budget, but caution prevails due to a strong dollar, high bond yields, and concerns over rate cuts. The rupee hitting an all-time low further evoked the caution," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said. From the 30 blue-chip stocks, Power Grid, State Bank of India, Titan, Tata Steel, IndusInd Bank, UltraTech Cement, Adani Ports and Infosys were among the laggards. In contrast, Tata Motors, ITC, Nestle, Tata Consultancy Services, NTPC and Zomato were among the gainers. BSE smallcap gauge climbed 0.37 per cent, and the BSE midcap index rose 0.09 per cent.

"Nifty index saw a lacklustre start to the much-anticipated 'Santa Claus Rally Period,' with the index closing at 23,728, down 26 points. The sluggish session was attributed to persistent selling by FIIs, concerns over India's slowing economic growth, and a weakening Indian rupee, which hit a record low of Rs. 85.13 against the dollar. *—PTI*

Tata Consultancy Services, NTPC and Zomato are the gainers **PHOTO: PTI**

DUE TO FOREIGN OUTFLOWS

Rupee hits all-time low of 85.16 against USD

MUMBAI, 24 DEC

The Indian rupee plunged by 5 paise, reaching a new all-time low of 85.16 against the US dollar in early trading on Tuesday, influenced by a robust US dollar and ongoing foreign capital outflows.

Forex traders attributed the decline to increased dollar demand and rising crude oil prices, driven by a fluctuating geopolitical landscape, although a buoyant domestic equity market provided some level of support. The surging dollar and escalating bond yields in the United States prompted foreign investors to engage in profit-booking by selling off Indian equities.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee started at 85.10 but quickly dropped to the fresh low of 85.16 against the greenback, representing a decline of 5 paise from its previous closing. On Monday, the rupee closed at 85.11, down 7 paise.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which measures the greenback's strength against a selection of six currencies, rose by 0.10 per cent to 107.92, amidst increasing US Treasury yields and concerns over potential delays in interest rate cuts by the US Federal Reserve.

On the domestic equity front, the 30-share benchmark index Sensex showed marginal gains, up by 15.97 points, or 0.02 per cent, at 78,556.14 points, while the Nifty rose by 13.70 points, or 0.06 per cent, to 23,767.15 points.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital markets on Monday, offloading shares worth Rs 168.71 crore, according to exchange data. *—PTI*

Mutual fund sector on a high; asset surges ₹17 lakh cr in 2024

NEW DELHI, 24 DEC

After a stellar 2023, the mutual fund industry sustained its growth momentum in 2024 with an impressive Rs 17 lakh crore surge in assets, driven by buoyant equity markets, robust economic growth, and increasing investor participation. Experts are predicting the positive trend will extend into 2025.

Kaustubh Belapurkar, Director-Manager Research at Morningstar Investment Research India, said, "The mutual fund industry's assets are expected to continue growing at a healthy pace in 2025. With rising penetration among retail investors, flows into equity funds, particularly through Systematic Investment Plans (SIPs), are likely to remain robust."

PHOTO:X

The year 2024 saw a substantial net inflow of Rs 9.14 lakh crore, alongside a significant 5.6 crore increase in investor count and a growing popularity of SIPs, which alone contributed Rs 2.4 lakh crore, according to data from the Association of Mutual Fund Industry (Amfi).

The inflows lifted the industry's assets under management (AUM), reaching an all-time high of Rs 68 lakh crore by November-end, marking a 33 per cent growth over the Rs 50.78 lakh crore registered at the end of 2023.

This growth was way higher than 27 per cent rise and Rs 11 lakh crore addition in AUM in 2023, as well as the more modest growth in previous years.

This year's flows included an investment of Rs 3.53 lakh crore in equity-oriented schemes, Rs 1.44 lakh crore in hybrid schemes, and around Rs 2.88 lakh crore in debt schemes.

The net inflows into equity-oriented schemes stood at Rs 3.53 lakh crore, driven by sustained investor confidence and the structural shift toward long-term, disciplined investing through SIPs. *—PTI*

Govt launches AI tools to boost consumer protection

NEW DELHI, 24 DEC

Food and Consumer Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi on Tuesday launched several initiatives to strengthen consumer protection, including artificial intelligence-enabled helpline and tools to detect deceptive marketing practices, while major e-commerce players pledged to enhance online shopping safety.

Leading platforms, including Reliance Retail, Tata Sons and Zomato adopted a safety pledge as the government rolled out new consumer protection measures like the AI-enabled National Consumer Helpline, e-maap portal and Jago Grahak Jago mobile application.

- Government's e-Daakhil Portal has achieved 100% adoption for online complaint filing in states like Karnataka, Punjab and Rajasthan

"Significant progress has been made in expediting resolutions of consumer disputes," Joshi said at the National Consumer Day event.

The minister, who attended the event online, highlighted that out of 3,628 cases filed with the National Commission between January and November this year, 6,587 cases have been disposed of through the country's three-tier consumer court system at district, state and national levels. Government's e-Daakhil Portal, launched in 2020 and expanded nationwide in June 2023, has achieved 100 per cent adoption for online complaint filing in states like Karnataka, Punjab and Rajasthan, as well as several districts.

Addressing growing e-commerce concerns, Joshi said: "While this digital revolution offers incredible opportunities, the Indian government believes it is equally important for our consumers to feel confident and make informed choices." *—PTI*

Govt to issue rules on pesky calls next month

NEW DELHI, 24 DEC

The consumer affairs ministry will release guidelines next month to tackle unsolicited commercial communications or pesky calls, a senior government official said on Tuesday.

Consumer Affairs Secretary Nidhi Khare said the department has prepared draft guidelines in consultation with stakeholders, which will be harmonized with upcoming regulations of Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai).

"We are ready with the draft guidelines on pesky calls. We will harmonise it with their (Trai) norms and issue it next month," Khare told reporters on the sidelines of a National Consumer Day event.

Trai Chairman Anil Kumar Lahoti, who was also at the event, said the consumer affairs ministry is focusing on guidelines for business entities' roles, responsibilities and conduct, while the telecom regulator will separately introduce stricter norms in response to growing consumer complaints.

The initiative stems from a joint committee of Indian regulators, led by Trai, which decided to strengthen existing frameworks to protect consumer interests. *—PTI*

PHOTO:X

'Indian firm fund mobilisation surged 10 times over last 10 years'

NEW DELHI, 24 DEC

Over the last ten years, fund mobilisation by Indian companies has grown tenfold.

A report by the State Bank of India (SBI) says that fund mobilisation through capital markets has increased from Rs 12,068 crore in 2014 to Rs 1.21 lakh crore in FY25 (up to October). This significant growth reflects the strengthening of India's economy and the rising confidence of investors.

It said, "In the last 10-years, funds mobilized by Indian companies from capital markets has increased more than 10-fold."

The report also highlighted that a 1 per cent rise in the stock market's, market capitalisation contributes to a 0.06 per cent increase in the country's GDP growth rate.

A higher market capitalisation is an indicator of a robust economy, which fosters investor confidence and drives overall economic progress.

The report said, "A higher market capitalization signals robust economy and higher investor confidence consequently driving overall economic growth."

PHOTO:ANI

Additionally, an impulse response analysis shows that a one-standard-deviation shock in market capitalisation positively impacts the real economy, though the effect diminishes after three time periods.

The report also said that household participation in the stock market has also grown considerably. Savings in 'shares and debentures' have increased from 0.2 per cent of GDP in FY14 to around 1 per cent in FY24.

Furthermore, the share of these savings in overall household financial savings has risen from 1 per cent to 5 per cent during the same period. *—ANI*

FMCG growth slows amid inflation pressures

NEW DELHI, 24 DEC

The fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) industry is experiencing a slowdown, with volume growth dropping to 4.3 per cent during August-October this year, down from 6.4 per cent in the same period last year, according to Kantar's latest FMCG Pulse report.

The decline is also sequential, as growth was 4.5 per cent in the May-July quarter.

The report indicates that while urban market volume growth fell to 4.5 per cent from 6.9 per cent in 2023, such deceleration is rare following previous growth levels. It states: "Technically, urban growth is slowing, though it is far from a slump."

The rural FMCG market is also underperforming, with growth at just 4 per cent, slightly below urban performance, and challenged predominantly by wheat flour (atta) trends.

Nonetheless, personal care categories show promise, with growth climbing from 2.8 per cent to 5.4 per cent . *—PTI*

IN 2025

Auto sector to shift to sustainable mobility

NEW DELHI, 24 DEC

The Indian automobile industry is transitioning from traditional vehicle manufacturing to comprehensive mobility solutions amid an ongoing debate over which eco-friendly technologies should receive government incentives. This shift occurs against a backdrop of declining sales as post-pandemic demand wanes.

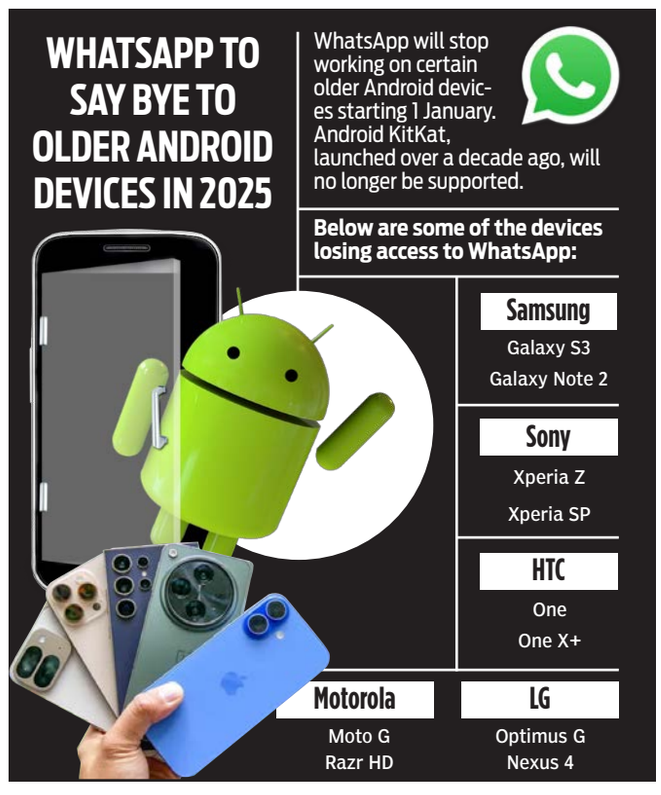
As the industry embraces advanced technologies, including autonomous driving and electrification, the upcoming Bharat Mobility Global Expo, part of India's flagship Auto Expo scheduled for 17-22 January, 2025, will showcase a variety of new models catering to diverse customer needs.

While electric vehicles (EVs) take centre stage in promoting sustainable mobility, the passenger vehicle segment is also advocating for hybrid, biofuel, and biogas technologies. However, consumers should prepare for higher costs, as manufacturers are set to increase prices in January to counteract rising production costs.

This shift occurs against a backdrop of declining sales as post-pandemic demand wanes **PHOTO: X**

Maruti Suzuki's managing director, Hisashi Takeuchi, expressed optimism about the industry's potential for long-term growth, citing plans to significantly scale up production capacity. Similarly, Tata Motors aims to strengthen its position in the EV market while enhancing customer satisfaction. JSW MG Motor India is focused on making the EV segment more appealing, while Toyota advocates for proportional incentives across all eco-friendly technologies. Kia India's managing director, Gwanggu Lee, highlighted the importance of various alternatives beyond electrification.

In the luxury sector, Mercedes-Benz and Audi both expect continued growth in EV adoption, bolstered by new vehicle launches and increasing demand from high-net-worth individuals. Reflecting on 2024, the industry faced sales challenges, yet significant progress was made in introducing new energy vehicles. *—PTI*



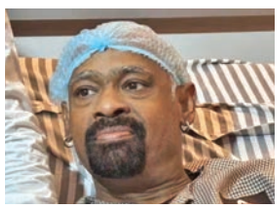


PHOTO: X

Kambli develops fever in hospital, condition stable

THANE, 24 DEC

Former India cricketer Vinod Kambli, admitted to the ICU of a private hospital in Thane district, developed a fever on Tuesday, but his condition was stable, doctors treating him said on Tuesday. Kambli, 52, is responding to the treatment for urinary tract infections for which he was admitted at Akruti Hospital near Bhiwandi town on Saturday, Dr Vivek Trivedi told PTI. Kambli is likely to be shifted out of the ICU within a day or two and discharged after about four days, he said. He said the condition of the Mumbai-based former cricketer was critical four days back when he had an extreme urinary infection as puss had got collected in his bladder. The puss was removed when he was admitted to the hospital. His condition was stable at present, the doctor added. —*PTI*

Hero MotoSports names Cornejo as new rider

NEW DELHI, 24 DEC

Hero MotoSports Team Rally on Tuesday named young Chilean rider Nacho Cornejo as its new recruit while announcing a three-member team for the Dakar Rally 2025. Cornejo will team up with Sebastian Buhler and 2024 FIM World Rally-Raid Championship (W2RC) winner Ross Branch. This will be the team's ninth appearance in the world's toughest race, scheduled to take place in Saudi Arabia from 3 to 17 January. It was memorable 2024 for the young team as it secured an overall second finish. Dakar 2025 will also be the opening race of the fourth edition of the World Rally Raid Championship (W2RC). —*PTI*

Lakdawala wins in Young Rider showjumping title

NEW DELHI, 24 DEC

Chennai's Ali Hatim Lakdawala, riding Leonardo Van Holli, clocked an impressive 33.31 seconds to clinch the Young Rider Showjumping champion title at the Junior National Equestrian Championship. Siddhant Jaiswal, Jaiveer Verma, and Geethika Tikkisetty secured the first place with a cumulative score of 178.22 in the the Young Rider (age group 18-21) team dressage event at the Army Polo & Riding Club. Lakdawala edged past AEF Cup CSIY-B silver medallist E Surya Aditya, astride Calimero, (37.22 seconds), while AEF Cup CSIJ-B silver medallist Geethika Tikkisetty, riding Brogonenn Saint Paer, secured third place with a time of 40.93 seconds in the show jumping category. Divyaraj Singh Rathore, Jaiwant Nawle, Aradhy Singh Chouhan and Sresh Raju Mantena (210.24 points) secured the silver medal. —*PTI*

FIFPRO against FIFA's temporary transfer rules

ZURICH, 24 DEC

The world soccer players' union disagreed with FIFA's temporary changes to transfer rules on Monday following the landmark Lassana Diarra judgement. Former France international Diarra challenged FIFA 's rules due to a dispute with a club dating to 2014, and the European Court of Justice ruled in October that some rules were contrary to European Union law because they restricted freedom of movement and were anti-competitive. FIFA then opened a "global dialogue" and on Monday published interim amendments which take effect in time for the January transfer window. They "strike a balanced compromise," FIFA said in a statement. But global players' union FIFPRO was against the changes, and accused FIFA of failing to reach consensus.—*PTI*

Harleen's ton fuels 115 run win against West Indies

Victory propels India to unassailable 2-0 lead in the series

VADODARA, 24 DEC

Harleen Deol underscored her growing maturity with an impressive maiden hundred, the foundation of India's 115-run win over the West Indies in the second Women's ODI here on Tuesday.

The victory also propelled India to an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series.

Deol (115, 103b, 16x4) powered India's record-equalling 358 for five and she received ample support from Pratika Rawal (76, 86b, 10x4, 1x6), Smriti Mandhana (53, 47b, 7x4, 2x6) and Jemimah Rodrigues (52, 36b, 6x4, 1x6).

The task of chasing 359 was always going to be out of Windies' reach, and they were bowled out for 243 despite skipper Hayley Matthews making a flowing hundred (106, 109b, 13x4).

The writing on the wall was clear once the Indian bowlers reduced Windies to 69 for four inside the first 20 overs.

Harleen Deol and Pratika Rawal during 2nd Women's ODI match *PHOTO: X*

The Indian bowlers also deserve a good chunk of credit for sticking to good lines on a slightly spongy wicket.

They attacked the stumps regularly and leg-spinner Priya Mishra was splendid while mixing up leg-breaks and googles without any visible change in action.

But for an imposing total, India should also thank Mandhana and Rawal for adding 110 runs off the opening wicket in just 16.3 overs, their second successive 100-run partnership in ODIs.

Rawal, who raised her maiden ODI fifty in 58 balls, looked well settled for a hundred in only her second 50-over game, but the right-hander failed to negotiate Zaida James' delivery with a bit of extra bounce, scooping it to Qiana Joseph at short mid-wicket.

Skipper Harmanpreet Kaur could not produce a big one, getting bowled in her attempt to slog sweep Afy Fletcher's full-length delivery. —*PTI*

CHAMPIONS TROPHY SCHEDULE

India, Pakistan to clash on 23 Feb

DUBAI, 24 DEC

India will play all their matches of the Champions Trophy in Dubai with the marquee clash against arch-rivals Pakistan scheduled on 23 February, the International Cricket Council (ICC) announced on Tuesday.

PTI had reported last week that India will play all their matches in Dubai including the semifinal and final if they qualify.

As has been the case with ICC events, India and Pakistan have been clubbed in the same group which also have New Zealand and Bangladesh.

Group B comprises South Africa, Australia, Afghanistan and England.

The tournament opener will be played in Karachi on 19 February when hosts Pakistan face New Zealand and the final is scheduled for 9 March.

India will open their campaign against Bangladesh on February 20 before taking on Pakistan three days later. Their final league fixture will be against New Zealand on 2 March.

Group B action begins on 21 February when Afghanistan square up against South Africa in Karachi.

A big weekend then kicks off with rivals England and Australia clashing in Lahore on 22 February.

The eight sides in the Champions Trophy are the teams that finished in the top eight in the points table at ODI World Cup in India last year.

The schedule was announced after a deadlock over the hosting of the tournament ended with the ICC keeping India's games at a neutral venue as desired while having a similar arrangement for Pakistan for ICC events in India till 2027. —*PTI*

Modern-day greats figure out their path: Rohit backs Kohli

MELBOURNE, 24 DEC

With a smile, India captain Rohit Sharma on Tuesday played down concerns around Virat Kohli's struggles outside the off-stump in Australia and backed his longtime teammate to the hilt, saying "modern-day greats figure out their own path."

Kohli's five innings in this series Down Under read 5, 100 not out, 7, 11 and 3 for a total of 126 runs at an average of 31.50, not something the team or the batting maestro himself had hoped for before embarking on the challenging tour.

Rohit Sharma dismissed fears about the knee injury he suffered during practice, saying it was fine, while keeping the suspense over his batting position.

Rohit had got hit on the left knee during the training session at the MCG on Sunday and there was speculation about the seriousness of the injury.

"My knee is fine," said Rohit during a media interaction ahead of the fourth Border-Gavaskar Test here from December 26.

The trio of Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shubman Gill and Rishabh Pant is aboard "the same boat" when it comes to erratic form in the ongoing Test series against Australia but skipper Rohit Sharma feels none of them should be "overburdened" with suggestions as it would complicate matters.

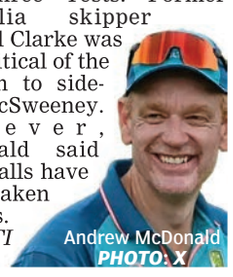
Teen batter Sam Konstas is set to make a dream debut at the MCG during the Boxing Day Test against India even as an injury cloud looms over prolific run-getter Travis Head, who suffered a quadriceps muscle strain during the third game at the Gabba. —*PTI*

Rohit Sharma *PHOTO: X*

McDonald defends dropping Sweeney for Konstas

Australia head coach Andrew McDonald on Tuesday defended the selection committee's decision to drop Nathan McSweeney in middle of the series for Sam Konstas, saying the talented teenager will post a "new challenge" for India.

McSweeney, a makeshift opener, was dropped because of a string of low scores in the first three Tests. Former Australia skipper Michael Clarke was very critical of the decision to sideline McSweeney. However, McDonald said tough calls have to be taken at times. —*PTI*



Andrew McDonald *PHOTO: X*

85 ELIGIBLE PLAYERS

Masters adds 10 players, Glover just makes it

NEW YORK, 24 DEC

Lucas Glover held down the 50th spot in the final world ranking of the year, making him one of 10 players who will be added to the invitation list to play in the Masters.

The field has eight more players than it did at this time a year ago.

The Masters takes the top 50 in the Official World Golf Ranking at the end of the calendar year, and it will take the top 50 not already invited from the world ranking published a week before the tournament is held April 10-13.

The addition of the 10 players brings the field to 85 players who are eligible and expected to play.

There were 77 players who were eligible at this time a year ago, a difference that would point to weaker fields in the PGA Tour's FedEx Cup Fall.

Glover had dipped outside the top 50 in the last few weeks, but the ranking is based on a formula that measures a two-year period with points gradually losing value.

Lucas Glover *PHOTO: X*

It was the second straight year McCarthy and Lee earned spots in the Masters through the year-end world ranking. Neither has won on the PGA Tour.

Five of those fall winners — Matt McCarty, Kevin Yu, Nico Echavarria, Rafael Campos and Maverick McNealy — will be playing the Masters for the first time. —*PTI*

AFRIDI REQUESTS EXCLUSION FROM SA TEST SQUAD

KARACHI, 24 DEC

Pakistan's premier fast bowler Shaheen Shah Afridi had requested the team management and national selectors to not consider him for the Test matches in South Africa because of workload management since he wants to be "100 percent fit" for the ICC Champions Trophy in February-March.

After the Pakistan squad was announced for the two Tests in South Africa without Shaheen, the interim head coach and senior selector, Aaqib Javed, said that the left-arm pacer's workload is being managed to keep him fresh for the Champions Trophy.

"The truth is Shaheen himself requested he not be considered for Test matches until the Champions Trophy is over," a source said.

During this period Pakistan is playing two Tests in South Africa and two Tests at home against West Indies. —*PTI*

Ganemat wins women's Skeet title again

NEW DELHI, 24 DEC

Punjab's Ganemat Sekhon underlined her supremacy in skeet shooting in India, winning a second successive national championship title with a confident display in the individual women's final here on Tuesday.

Ganemat shot down 50 out of the 60 allotted final targets, to comfortably relegate state-mate Asees Chhina, who managed 46 hits, to silver.

Olympian Raiza Dhillon took bronze.

Also at the Dr Karni Singh Shooting Range, recently crowned World University Games champion Bhavtegh Singh Gill made it a clean sweep for Punjab in the senior skeet competitions, bagging his maiden national title with a score of 54 in the men's skeet final.

Fatehbir Singh Shergill of Air India shot three targets less for silver while Olympian Mairaj Ahmad Khan of Uttar Pradesh bagged the bronze with 43 hits out of the first 50 targets.

In Bhopal, where the rifle nationals are underway at the M.P. State Academy Shooting range, Karthik Sabari Raj and R. Narmada Nithin of Tamil Nadu bossed the 10m air rifle mixed team competition with a relatively comfortable 16-6 win over a strong Railway pairing of Olympian Arjun Babuta and recent ISSF World Cup Finals medal winner Sonam Uttam Maskar. The host state's Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar and Gautami Bhanot won bronze. —*PTI*

Ganemat Sekhon *PHOTO: X*

- Ganemat shot down 50 out of the 60 allotted final targets, to comfortably relegate state-mate Asees Chhina

Weightlifting C'ships: Parv wins 2 bronze

DOHA, 24 DEC

Talented lifter Parv Chaudhary secured two bronze medals in 96kg category to continue India's domination at the Asian Youth and Junior Weightlifting Champion ships here on Tuesday.

Chaudhary won the medals in clean and jerk and total sections. He had a total lift of 303 kg.

India thus won a 12 medals in total, including three gold, four silver and five bronze. Besides, there were 8 medals in snatch and 10 medals in clean and jerk sections. —*PTI*

Paralympic champ Harvinder alleges 'discrimination' in awards

NEW DELHI, 24 DEC

Indian archer Harvinder Singh, who won a gold at Paris Paralympics, on Tuesday alleged "discrimination" in the distribution of sports awards and questioned why the Khel Ratna honour was not bestowed on this year's medallists at the Games like the Tokyo edition.

Singh, a Tokyo Games bronze winner, claimed his maiden gold medal at Paris after defeating Lukasz Ciszek of Poland in the final 6-0.

"Discrimination in sports," Singh wrote on X.

"Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Gold medallists were awarded the Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award, but what about Paris 2024 Paralympic Gold medalists? Same competition, same gold, same pride — why not the same award?"

Following India's gold-winning performance at the 2021 Tokyo Paralympics, shooter Avani Lekhara, javelin thrower Sumit Antil and shuttler Pramod Bhagat were honoured with the Khel Ratna along with Olympic champion javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra.

Archer Harvinder Singh *PHOTO: X*

"In the year 2021, all Olympic medal winners and Paralympic gold medal winners were honoured with the Khel Ratna, and it is truly inspiring to see the government continue to recognize the immense contributions of our athletes," national archery coach and Dronacharya awardee Jiwanjot Singh Teja tweeted.

"However, I understand that the policy may have now changed, which brings me to request your kind attention towards Harvinder Singh's exceptional achievements."

"I kindly request that you consider Harvinder Singh for the Khel Ratna Award, as recognizing his efforts will undoubtedly inspire countless other athletes and further enhance India's standing in the international sports community." — *PTI*

15-MEMBER TEAM

India name squad for U-19 Women's T20 WC

NEW DELHI, 24 DEC

India on Tuesday named a 15-member squad for next year's ICC Under-19 Women's T20 World Cup to be played in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia from 18 January to 2 February.

The Women's Selection Committee of the BCCI announced the squad to be led by Niki Prasad, while Sanika Chalke will be the vice-captain.

The squad has two wicket-keepers in Kamalini G and Bhavika Ahire, while three standby players, Nandhana S, Ira J and Anadi T, have also been included.

The 16 competing teams have been divided into four groups.

India are the defending champions, and are placed in Group A alongside hosts Malaysia, West Indies and Sri Lanka.

India are the defending champions, and are placed in Group A alongside hosts Malaysia, West Indies and Sri Lanka *PHOTO:X*

The tournament will be hosted by Bayuemas Oval.

Following the group phase, which runs from 19-23 January, the top three teams from each group will advance to the Super 6 stage -- two groups of six --, which will take place from 25-29 January.

Group 1 in Super 6 will include the top three teams each from Group A and D, while Group 2 will have the top three teams each from Group B and C.

Australia, Bangladesh, England, India, Ireland, New Zealand, Pakistan, South Africa, Sri Lanka, and the West Indies have qualified through their participation in the 2023 edition, while Malaysia earned automatic qualification as hosts. Nepal, Nigeria, Samoa, Scotland and the United States have earn ed their spots through the various regional qualification tournaments. —*PTI*

M Raghu, Devika win Senior Nationals Titles

BENGALURU, 24 DEC

Karnataka's M Raghu and Haryana's Devika Sihag secured their maiden senior national badminton titles, emerging champions in the men's and women's sections respectively at the 86th edition of the tournament here on Tuesday.

Raghu, who won the Egypt international this year, saved three match points in the decider to beat former champion Mithun Manjunath 14-21, 21-14, 24-22 in the final that clocked just under an hour.

For Devika, it was a befitting end to a successful season as she ended the giant killing run of Shriyanshi Valishetty 21-15, 21-16 in the women's singles summit clash.

The 19-year-old from Haryana had claimed Swedish Open and Portugal International, besides reaching final at Estonian and Dutch International.

Junior National Champions Arsh Mohammad and Sanskar Saraswat added the senior nationals title to their trophy cabinet as they upset top seeds Naveen P and Lokesh V 12-21, 21-12, 19-21 in men's final.

In doubles categories, Ayush Agarwal and Shruti Mishra defeated eighth seeds Rohan Kapoor and Ruthvika Shivani G 21-17 21-18 to bag the mixed doubles crown, while second seeds Arathi Sara Sunil and Varshini VS won the women's doubles title with a 21-18 20-22 21-17 win over eighth seeds Priya Devi and Shruti. —*PTI*